

# **African-Caribbean Women Ageing Without Children**

## **Examining the Impact of Life Course Experiences on the Contexts and Pathways to African-Caribbean Women Ageing Without children**

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## **Abstract**

Despite the growing research and literature examining the pathways and context to ageing without children, there are few studies that reflect the diversity of ageing childless adults. None of the available studies specifically includes Black and Ethnic Minority groups in the sample nor do they explore the cultural, social and religious contexts in which ageing without children takes place. Furthermore, none of the studies considers a range of different key life events and factors throughout the life course that shape an individual's experiences and pathways of living without children in older age. Studies remain largely homogenous, focusing their attention on the experiences of adults from White British and European backgrounds.

To date, there are no available studies that examine the experiences of African-Caribbean women ageing without children. Ageing African-Caribbean women living in Britain have their own unique experiences, culture and identity, thus, their lived experiences of ageing without children are likely to differ from White British and European women (Etienne, 2014; Reynolds, 2005). This study examines the impact of life course experiences on the context and pathways to African-Caribbean women ageing without children. My study engaged ten African-Caribbean women (both those who migrated and those who were born in England) who had varied experiences and pathways to ageing without children. The study was underpinned by Black Feminist Standpoint Theory and the participants were interviewed using in-depth semi-structured interviews with a life course focus. Thematic analysis led to the development of several key themes that were identified as shaping and contributing to the women's context and pathways to ageing without children; for example, experiences of loss throughout the life course, including migration, parental death in childhood, infertility, divorce and miscarriage. In line with a life course perspective, this study found that participants experienced multiple trajectories to childlessness and shifting

identities throughout their life course. The diverse narrative accounts identified the many ways childlessness can occur across the life course and how losses can be managed and revisited in later life.

While such findings add to the existing research within this research area, they also depart from it. Some of these key themes and findings suggest that the women's experiences throughout their life course were specific to their African-Caribbean heritage and their subsequent status as older women who were ageing without children. Culture and religion played a key factor in shaping the women's earlier socialisation and views on family life, children and marriage. However, some of the women's accounts provided an insight into continuity and change in beliefs and practices from early socialisation. Furthermore, from the findings, it was evident that racist and sexist ideologies shared similar features, such as treating ageing African-Caribbean women as objects who lacked human worth and dignity (Collins, 2000). This was evident in the women's treatment within varied social systems such as health care and education establishments. The women's accounts reflected experiences of resistance and resilience in light of some of their experiences. However, resistance and resilience changed depending on the circumstances the particular women were in.

The study provided an understanding and insight into areas that we have very limited knowledge of and has bridged the gap between disparate pieces of research identified in the literature review. Together they offer a clearer and more robust understanding of African-Caribbean women ageing without children, and also provide a contemporary qualitative Black Feminist British perspective.

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# **Chapter One: Introduction and Thesis Plan**

## **1.1 Reflections on my personal biography and its impact on this study**

The primary aim in undertaking this research was to examine the impact of life course experiences on the context and pathways to African-Caribbean women ageing without children. In this study, ageing refers to the process of growing older. The women in the study are typically defined as middle aged (see Table 1: Demographic profile of participants) and the study explores their experiences as they age without children.

My motivation for undertaking this research was threefold and comprised personal, professional and academic interests. I am a third-generation African-Caribbean woman; my parents are the children of Caribbean migrants who came to the United Kingdom in the 1950s to help in the development of the United Kingdom following the Second World War. Much of my earlier socialisation and upbringing was shaped by Caribbean cultural identity and Christian religious beliefs. As a young girl, I was raised as an African-Caribbean, despite being born in the United Kingdom. I understood that for African-Caribbean people there was a very clear and distinct expectation to adhere to specific norms and values. My parents, who were also socialised in the same way by their parents, despite being born in the United Kingdom, reinforced these values and norms on a daily basis. This ranged from day-to-day ways of living regarding spoken language, listening to Caribbean music and eating Caribbean food to more fundamental beliefs such as faith in God, respect for parents and traditional gender norms about womanhood, motherhood and male roles.

Although I had one older brother, I grew up in a large extended family, my mother being one of seven and my father being one of five children. In our family and community, it was natural to have large families and we were always surrounded by cousins, aunts, uncles

and our grandparents. Having children was an expected part of everyone's life course and it was something that was casually spoken about rather than enforced.

From my experiences growing up, I remember being asked many times as a young girl, *"When you get older how many children will you have?"* To which I would reply, *"Three"*, and then run off to play or read a book. Having three children was something that seemed acceptable to say, which I was aware of even at that young age, despite not really having an understanding of what having children meant and how many I wanted. As a child and young adult, I never questioned my cultural identity and the expectations put upon me, as I never saw it in a negative way, and I was happy to live up to these ideas and expectations. I always wanted to please my family.

Moving forward a few years, as a young adult in my early twenties I saw many young women from my own background and family members having children and fitting into this traditional role, whereas I was passionate about my career and education. My parents were happy for me to fulfil my aspirations. My dad, who was the first person in the family to pass his eleven plus exam, go to university and then become a manager, was always an avid reader and an intellectual, which influenced my own motivation to study. My dad was always supported by his own parents and therefore it was natural for him to want to do the same for his own children. There was never a discussion about having children or getting married; rather, I would always say voluntarily, *"After I get my Masters degree I will get married, God willing, and have children."* This was accepted and never questioned. This was always a part of the plan; the plan that was encouraged by family and the wider African-Caribbean community to obtain my education and have a good career, get married and have children.

I decided to do a Masters in Social Work. It was linked to my experiences as both my parents worked in similar fields and they had a strong passion for helping people, which ignited my desire to also do the same. I thoroughly enjoyed my Masters and the academic side of my studies. This led me to want to pursue further academic studies and I considered the possibility of doing a PhD. During this time, I witnessed changes around me, in particular amongst my generation of African-Caribbean people. More specifically, I noticed their attitudes towards motherhood and parenting were changing compared to the cultural norms that we had grown up with. For example, having children outside of marriage and by multiple fathers had become widespread and was depicted by the media as something negative, linked with socio-economic deprivation and poor lifestyle choices (Reynolds, 2005). The women were termed 'baby-mothers' in a pejorative sense (Reynolds, 2005). This was something I was aware of and wished to avoid, due to my earlier socialisation, and I was more determined than ever to focus on a career and my education. Conversely, I witnessed my parents' generation continue to uphold strong traditional African-Caribbean values and beliefs. I found there to be a paradox between the second-generation African-Caribbean people upholding these values while their children did not. This led me to reflect and ask who am I and what are my values?

I started to volunteer in African-Caribbean community settings as a social worker and I found myself having conversations with women who had similar experiences to me. Although they were mostly significantly older than me, we openly talked about our experiences of not being married and not having children. They talked about their experiences of not having children and how being African-Caribbean and the African-Caribbean culture and religion impacted on their experiences. They also talked about experiencing stigma in their community as a result of not having children.

I realised that this was a real issue, not only for me but also for other African-Caribbean women too. I noticed that as a woman's age increased the stigma associated with childlessness was amplified. For example, the women and I faced relentless questioning and were often openly challenged for not having children. I started to become more reflective and asked myself questions, such as what had led to these women not having children. Why does being African-Caribbean and or the African-Caribbean culture and religion impact on their experiences of not having children? If I did not get married or have children, would I also be seen as deviant and experience stigma? How do these women navigate through life and manage their experiences?

This was the beginning of my intellectual curiosity to answer these questions and to find out more about the experiences and context of African-Caribbean women living without children. These reflections and questions led me to consider whether I could pursue this further as a PhD topic, given my previous desire to undertake one. To begin with, I was interested in finding out what research had already been undertaken in the area and what the main findings were. I started to do some initial reading, examining research in areas that reflected my interests; for example, women who lived without children, focusing my attention on pathways and context to ageing without children, how childlessness is understood and experienced in different cultures and environments, and the stigma associated with being childless as one ages. As I discuss in more detail in the literature review (Chapter Two, 2.2), these are the themes and messages prominent in the research I read during the initial stages. I found that few studies showed how a range of different key life events and factors through the life course might shape individuals' experiences and pathways to living without children in older age. The research on ageing without children was homogeneous, almost exclusively focusing on White European and North American populations, rather than considering cultural and religious differences and diversity. There are few studies that have explored ethnic and religious membership. There were clearly

significant gaps in the research and little insight into the experiences of African-Caribbean women ageing without children. Furthermore, my attention was drawn to the lack of Black women's voices in research in general. These insights influenced my decision to undertake this doctoral research and to use Black Feminist Standpoint Theory to underpin my research. Black Feminist Standpoint Theory recognises the importance of Black women in developing knowledge and understanding of Black women's experiences, by providing a framework through which the lived experiences of Black women can be understood within a society that is dominated by White people (Etienne, 2014). Black Feminist Standpoint Theory puts Black women at the centre of their lives and aims to represent them authentically and accurately.

As I have already indicated, my situation meant that I had a personal connection to the research area. The narrative stories that the older women shared with me (as I discuss above) resonated with me personally. I was able to position my own experiences in a wider context and learn from the women's experiences. However, I also believed that in terms of research such narratives could also provide a means to understand African-Caribbean women's personal lives and the context and pathways to them ageing without children.

My identity (being an insider researcher) and the use of Black Feminist Standpoint Theory meant that I was visible in the research. Being an African-Caribbean woman as well as my upbringing and personal and professional experiences inevitably influenced the research. Research on childless Black and Ethnic Minority groups has recognised the importance of the role of the insider researcher and how it can guide how studies are undertaken and understood (see Nahar and Richters, 2011).

As an African-Caribbean woman who was 'researching' other African-Caribbean women, I acknowledge that I was deemed to be in a privileged position and that my positioning

was advantageous. For example, there was the potential for deep understanding of the women's experiences and narratives. Also being an insider researcher may have enabled me to relate to the women better and for the women to feel more comfortable in sharing their stories with me. However, there were also many potential challenges. For example, there was a risk of assuming that I would inevitably know what the women had experienced and that our stories would be the same. I was keen to develop a research approach that considered my identity and helped me manage these potential challenges. It was important to adopt an approach that would put the women at the centre of the study and help me to explore individual African-Caribbean women's accounts of their life course, which included ageing without children. My areas of investigation, my commitment to a Black Feminist Standpoint Theory and my own personal context led me to use a qualitative approach via in-depth interviews with a life course focus (see Chapter Three, Methodology).

The literature on younger Black African adults found that the experiences of childless women were shaped by the cultural and social environment and the beliefs it upheld (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Larsen, 1995; Tabong and Adongo, 2013; Weinger, 2009). That, coupled with my own experiences of African-Caribbean culture and traditions shaping my experiences of living without children as well as those of the women I spoke to while working at a local community centre, led me to want to examine why and how African-Caribbean culture, norms, beliefs and traditions shaped the women's experiences. Furthermore, there are significant gaps in the existing literature: it has been found that there are currently no reported studies of childless African-Caribbean women's personal stories or accounts of ageing without children that take into account the cultural, social and religious contexts of ageing without children. My study aims to address this.

## **1.2 Aims and areas addressed in the study**

It is important to note that research topics rather than research questions were deemed more appropriate, given the exploratory and under-researched nature of my study. Based on the above rationale, the broad goals for my study have been translated into the following research areas:

1. Culture expressed in terms of the participants' beliefs and cultural identity
2. How participants' beliefs, cultural identity and life course experiences have shaped their contexts and pathways to ageing without children.

## **1.3 Overview of the thesis**

Chapter Two comprises the literature review and is organised in four sections. Section 2.2 examines the research on ageing without children, considering definitions and research on the pathways to ageing without children. Section 2.3 considers research that examines the experiences of childless African communities, looking at the influence of culture and religion on their experiences. Section 2.4 focuses on the African-Caribbean community, considering migration and earlier experiences in the United Kingdom, identity, and a contemporary construction of African-Caribbean motherhood in the United Kingdom. Finally, Section 2.5 reviews and analyses the findings from the literature review, focusing on the limitations and gaps in the current research base. I also outline how the literature helped to drive the study and its direction, and the approach taken to the study. I conclude the chapter by identifying my own research questions for this doctoral study.

Chapter Three discusses the methodological underpinnings of the research project which supported and informed this study and their relevance and suitability for research of this kind. I discuss how the methodological approaches helped to shape the way I engaged and interacted with the participants and how I conducted the research.



In Chapter Four, the Methods chapter, I discuss how I conducted the research, the ethical considerations and some of the dilemmas and challenges I faced. I also discuss the process of analysis of interview transcripts using thematic analysis and the major themes from the thematic analysis.

Chapter Five contains the analysis of participants' interview data and is organised into three sections: loss, identity, and resistance and resilience. The findings relevant to each theme are presented under each of these headings.

Chapter Six discusses the key findings, the contribution of this research project to the existing research base on ageing without children and the limitations of the study. I also critically appraise the use of the Black Feminist Standpoint Theory and suggest some implications from this study, identifying further research.

Chapter Seven provides a summary of key findings and concludes the study.

# Chapter Two: Literature Review

## 2.1 Overview

As part of the research process a review of the literature was undertaken that provided a framework and context within which to locate my study. I established that there was no coherent body of knowledge about African-Caribbean women – and in fact no thoroughgoing studies of African-Caribbean women ageing without children. My intention was to undertake a comprehensive and critical review of the literature in order to understand the ‘state of the art’ in terms of current knowledge and understanding of ageing and living without children. I drew from broader research on ageing without children that focused predominantly on White and homogenous samples and research on younger Black (African) adults, given the absence of research exploring experiences of ageing as a African-Caribbean woman without children

The literature review comprises four sections. In section 2.2 I begin by reviewing definitions of childlessness and how they have evolved over time. Second, the pathways and contexts of ageing without children are reviewed and the place of gender considered. Section 2.3 examines the experiences of living without children from research which focuses on younger African participants. The social, cultural and religious contexts of living without children are considered as well as the implications for participants. Section 2.4 outlines a brief historical context of African-Caribbean women living in the United Kingdom. Specifically, it considers African-Caribbean women’s migration experiences from the Caribbean to the United Kingdom and the impact of migration on family life and relationships. I then describe some of the earlier experiences of African-Caribbean people in the United Kingdom, focusing on racism, housing, education, self-support services and welfare. This section then explores research on contemporary constructions of motherhood amongst African-Caribbean women. Finally, Section 2.5 (synthesis and rationale to the

study) reviews and analyses the findings from the literature review, considering the strengths, limitations, gaps and silences in the current research base on ageing without children and the African-Caribbean community and how they shape this study. I conclude the chapter by identifying my own research questions for this doctoral study.

## **2.2 Ageing without children**

### **2.2.1 Definitions of childlessness and key issues around defining the term**

The term childless is universally used and accepted by many to describe a person who does not have children. This term is more likely to be used with women rather than men without children and the definition is contested. Childlessness is linked to the pronatalist idea that motherhood is a natural part of women's life course. Thus, a woman who does not have a child is at risk of being constructed as being less than a woman with a child. As Allen and Wiles (2013: 208) state, childlessness implies that the person without a child is lacking in having children: "*childless, without children and non-parent*".

Other terms, such as voluntary and involuntary childlessness, have attempted to make a distinction between different groups of childless people. However, these terms often view childlessness as a dichotomy between those who make an active choice and those who are unable to have children due to infertility or health reasons. Allen and Wiles' (2013) research on pathways to ageing without children used positioning theory to evidence how the conventional voluntary–involuntary binary fails to capture the diverse experiences of those living without children. For example, where might an adult position themselves if they had delayed childbirth due to reasons of career development and when they wanted to conceive it was not possible? The above terms do little to consider the diverse trajectories that may lead to women and men not having children.

The term infertile has also been used interchangeably with the term involuntary childlessness. The term infertile can be critiqued for the negative connotations associated with it, as it implies an inability to conceive, often blaming the women for not being able to have children (Dykstra and Wagner, 2007). However, the development of concepts such as the ‘postponement movement’ challenges the terms voluntary and involuntary childlessness (Allen and Wiles, 2013). The ‘postponement movement’ includes situations such as women who planned to have children but delayed having them to focus on personal aspirations, until it became impossible to conceive (Boddington and Didham, 2008; Toulemon, 1996). More recently, the term childfree has been used to describe adults who neither have nor desire to have children (Tessarolo, 2006). Childfree has been used in research to imply a more positive choice not to have children, suggesting experiences such as liberation from the expectations and responsibilities of raising a child (Bulcroft and Teachman, 2004). Being childfree, however, may reinforce stereotypes associated with childlessness, such as being selfish, immature, free of the burden of parenting and free to do as one pleases (Allen and Wiles, 2013). Acknowledging women who are ‘okay either way’ about having children can be liberating for those individuals who are free to decide whether they want children or not (McQuillan et al., 2011).

It is evident that the definitions and understandings of what it means to live without children are far more complex than the terms imply. For instance, Rowland (1982) uses the term functional childlessness as a way to describe children and parents who have very little contact with each other or who are estranged from one another. However, other research has acknowledged that some older adults may have outlived their own children (Dykstra and Wagner, 2007) or someone may have lost a child due to death or miscarriage (Allen and Wiles, 2013). It is important to acknowledge the different meanings and contexts of childlessness as the lived experience of adults who have never had children will differ significantly from those who have lost children due to a fatality, for example.

Research has also begun to acknowledge adults who do not have their own biological children but who foster and adopt children or who are step-parents (Dykstra and Hagestad, 2007; Umberson et al., 2010; Zhang and Hayward, 2001). The complexities and diversity around defining childlessness, as outlined above, have started to be acknowledged in research, providing a more nuanced understanding. Nevertheless, there remain some unanswered questions in terms of understanding individuals' experiences and the context of living without children. One key area that has been consistently overlooked is that of cultural differences in regard to the terms used. For instance, do Black and Ethnic Minority communities use specific terms or definitions to describe their experiences of childlessness? And do their experiences of not having children differ substantially from White communities?

There is a need for greater recognition of diversity and fluidity across the life course to reflect continuing changes regarding living without children, and a better understanding of complexities regarding childlessness is required (Allen and Wiles, 2013). Although the terms 'living/ageing without children' and 'childlessness' are used throughout the study, there is no absolute consensus as to what constitutes childlessness and the term remains somewhat contested.

### **2.2.2 Pathways to ageing without children**

Contemporary research suggests that the pathways and contexts to ageing without children centre on a number of different pathways, factors and circumstances over an individual's life course (Allen and Wiles, 2013; Connidis and McMullin, 1996; Wenger, 2001); for example, caring for older parents, marrying late and being separated from their spouse during the war. For other individuals, ageing without children was caused by

circumstances outside their control such as loss of a child, infertility, outliving children and/or having to give up a child up for adoption (Allen and Wiles 2013; Wenger, 2001).

Some older adults are childless because they remained unmarried, as remaining unmarried implied remaining childless (Dykstra and Wagner, 2007). Similarly, the Connidis and McMullin (1996) study found that the strongest factor in determining whether people remained childless was being single. Connidis and McMullin (1996) identified diversity underpinning the term 'singleness', including being single by choice and by circumstances such as including being unable to find a suitable partner and/or caring for an ageing relative. Being single by choice was likely to align with people who were childless by choice, the experience of about a third of the men and women in their study. Further, the findings indicated that some primary reasons for married childless adults were factors such as age, fate, infertility and a history of genetically transmitted conditions. Women were often blamed for not being able to have children and were considered to be at fault due to their age or experiences of infertility. Blaming women for childlessness reflected a social and cultural tendency to focus on female infertility rather than on the males (Allen and Wiles, 2013). Other commentators such as Boyacioglu and Turkmen (2008) have suggested that pronatalist views and traditional gender norms often result in women being blamed for childlessness.

The different pathways to ageing without children can also bring about different reactions and responses. For example, a number of participants in Allen and Wiles' (2013) study saw childlessness as a positive and active choice and an enjoyable way of living life. For some other participants, childlessness was an active choice taken to break a cycle of family violence, whereas other participants explained that being childless was as a result of continuous change and social upheaval. The participants who were childless because they could not have a child openly talked about their feelings of emotional distress and grief at

being unable to conceive a child. Allen and Wiles' (2013) study also highlights that participants were unwilling to marry and have children with 'just anyone'. The findings from Allen and Wiles (2013) study have developed a knowledge base of the unique contexts of ageing without children. Their study showed that the contexts of ageing without children vary; therefore it is important not to assume that everyone has similar experiences. This is an important study because it critically unpacks the diverse circumstances in which people may age without children.

Increasingly, studies have argued that women and men experience distinctive pathways and contexts to childlessness (Connidis and McMullin, 1996; Keizer et al., 2008).

Education, employment and marriage are gendered experiences and, to some extent, are associated with being childless (Allen and Wiles, 2013; Connidis and McMullin, 1996; Wenger, 2001). Older adults without children and women in particular have often had different occupational careers than those who become parents (Dykstra and Fokkema, 2000; Dykstra and Liefbroer, 1995; Müller, 1983). The absence of child-rearing responsibilities seems to have better enabled them to devote themselves to career pursuits. The work patterns of women who have never married stand out, as these women have lengthy careers and reach relatively high positions in the corporate structure (Dykstra and Fokkema, 2000; Dykstra and Liefbroer, 1995; Müller, 1983). Similarly, Keizer et al.'s (2008) study found that educational attainment and career progression increased the likelihood of women remaining childless but, conversely, increased the likelihood of men becoming a father. Never having a long-term relationship but rather having multiple and/or short-term partnerships was one of the main reasons for men remaining childless.

## **2.3 Young African adults' experiences of living without children**

### **2.3.1 Experience of living without children and its implications**

As there are no current reported studies that examine African-Caribbean women ageing without children, my strategy was to review studies that focused on younger women from varied countries in Africa who did not have children, to see what the implications and/or similarities might suggest for African-Caribbean women. A number of studies have examined younger African women's experiences of childlessness, especially in societies that are underpinned by cultural and religious beliefs that promote traditional gender roles and pronatalism. In societies where religious membership and adherence to religious beliefs and practices are expected as the norm, views on children and childlessness are often influenced by religious discourse and pronatalist ideology (Tabong and Adongo, 2013). Research has found that being childless in these societies can result in severe consequences for the childless adult, particularly women (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014). Having a child is often viewed as an obligation for women, which reflects wider social attitudes about their purpose, as motherhood is perceived as the most important and desirable role for women. There is no obvious legitimate place for a childless woman who is seen as deviating from traditional norms and expectations (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Tabong and Adongo, 2013; Weinger, 2009).

Childless women face more severe emotional, financial and social consequences and difficulties as a result of being childless, leading to marginalisation and invalidation (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Tabong and Adongo, 2013). Earlier studies such as that of Feldman-Savelsberg (1999) found that among the Bangangte community in Cameroon, women who are infertile were at risk of being divorced, resulting in women being deprived of access to their husbands' property. Similarly Larsen's (1995) study on childless Cameroonian women found that they were often abandoned due to being considered



unmarriageable, and were left struggling to earn a livelihood. An earlier study undertaken by Ademola (1982) found that childless women from Ekiti Yoruba in Nigeria were treated as outcasts. Supporting Ademola's (1982) earlier findings, Cornwall's (2001:145) survey in Nigeria also found that a frequently held view was that "a woman who has not given birth to a child may as well never have been born."

While most of the studies reviewed focused on younger women, Tabong and Adongo (2013) briefly acknowledged that older childless women in Ghana were often seen as witches and abandoned by their relatives. Although there is a limited representation of old childless women in existing research, it is reasonable to conjecture that if you are childless as a younger woman you will continue potentially to be seen as an outcast, impacting on the experience of ageing.

Research has found that a woman's status in her community and her value are linked to her ability to have children (Larsen, 1995). For example, a study undertaken by Boddy (1989) found that in the Sudan being unable to conceive threatens women's power and the social order, as children are considered to be a source of power for women in relation to men. Moreover, having children is deemed to be important in terms of women's progression through the life stages and in the creation of their identity as they mature. For example, childless women from Tswana in Botswana cannot attain womanhood (Suggs, 1993). This may result in them never being seen as women or having the respect that comes with reaching womanhood by achieving motherhood (Suggs, 1993).

Studies show that in some regions in Africa many people believe that it is a man's right to have children; thus, if a woman cannot have children, it is the man's right to abandon or replace his wife (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Larsen, 1995; Tabong and Adongo, 2013; Weinger, 2009). Within this current literature a dominant theme is that women are

assumed to be responsible for the couple's childlessness and therefore they should face the consequences. Being unable to have sons, or having only one child, also constitutes a form of infertility as cultural norms dictate that large families are preferable and that having sons is a necessity (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Tabong and Adongo, 2013). This evidences the different meanings and constructions of childlessness as well as the fact that in some societies girls are often seen as having very little value. Ibisomi and Mudege's (2014) study showed that a broad definition was given to voluntary childlessness in Nigeria, including adults that were childless because they remained in a relationship with an infertile partner and those who could not have their own children and chose not to adopt.

The majority of the studies reviewed do not explicitly examine the pathways to and reasons for childlessness. Studies invariably group childless women together, referring to them as infertile, childless or women who are unable to conceive. Notably, Weiger's (2009) study has shed more light on the different reasons why Cameroonian women interviewed were childless and how this shaped their experience. For example, some women in her study had miscarriages and health issues while others had partners who did not want to be intimate with them. The varied experiences determined the degree of self-blame and condemnation they faced. An overall finding from the studies reviewed is that not having children, whether involuntarily or not, warrants similar treatments. There was some evidence of a more tolerant attitude to involuntary childlessness, suggesting possible changes in perceptions of the condition (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Tabong and Adongo, 2013). Nevertheless, childless women were still seen as different and were, at times, considered as an object of pity or possibly suspicion, for example, bringing bad luck.

### **2.3.2 Religion and childlessness**

In light of the absence of studies which examined ageing African-Caribbean women's experiences of childlessness in the context of religiosity, I have reviewed research from

varied countries that examined how religion shapes adults' experiences of living without children. For example, Ibisomi and Mudege's (2014) study of childlessness in Nigeria found that having children was seen as a religious duty and obligation. Religion was also used to justify exerting pressure and forcing couples to have children. The link between religiosity and having children has also been reported in other countries worldwide. For example, Kaufmann (2009) has shown an association between strict religious beliefs and high birth rates in Muslim societies, while in Italy voluntary childlessness tended to be higher among women who were less religious (Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008). Studies have found that many religious groups encourage procreation and traditional family formation (Merz and Liefbroer, 2012; Myers, 2004; Pearce, 2002). For example, adults who attended Christian churches reported that there was more emphasis on getting married and having children and less emphasis on individual autonomy (Mahoney, 2005).

Some studies have found that religion has been used to explain why individuals are childless. For example, Van Rooij et al.'s (2009) study of Turkish immigrants found that many couples believed that having or not having children was the will of Allah. Similarly, Weinger's (2009: 53) study found that some of the childless women from Cameroon believed that since the "Lord didn't give me children...I had to accept it that way" and that their childless status was "the will of God".

Religious beliefs also influenced some women's decisions not to seek medical treatment to help them conceive, believing that medical intervention could "work against God's will" (Weinger, 2009: 53). Again, Karaca and Unsal's (2015) study found that some women believed that their childless status was as the result of their previous sins and/or mistakes, which is also seen in studies in other Muslim countries (Fido and Zahid, 2004; Weinger, 2009). Believing that God rewards obedience and punishes disobedience and sin helped many childless women make sense of their circumstance. It also shaped and informed the

meaning that women ascribe to being childless (Karaca and Unsal, 2015). Many childless women turned to God and prayed as a form of solace and to reduce feelings of desperation and despair (Karaca and Unsal, 2015).

## **2.4 The African-Caribbean community**

### **2.4.1 Who are African-Caribbean people?**

The term African-Caribbean is used to describe a group of people whose ancestors were taken from Africa via the trans-Atlantic slave trade to varied Caribbean islands between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Other names used to describe this group include Black, Black Caribbean and Caribbean (Bryon, 1999).

Geographically, the Caribbean includes the Caribbean Sea and all of the islands located to the southeast of the Gulf of Mexico, east of Central America and Mexico, and to the north of South America (Premdas, 1996). It is estimated that there are seven thousand islands, reefs, islets and cays throughout the Caribbean, of which thirteen are independent countries and others are dependent or overseas territories of other countries (Cohen, 1998).

The Caribbean islands include the Greater Antilles and the Lesser Antilles. The five largest Caribbean islands are a part of the Greater Antilles and are situated in the northern Caribbean. They include the Dominican Republic and Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Cayman Islands and Jamaica, whereas Trinidad and Tobago is also one of the largest of the Caribbean islands but is a part of the Lesser Antilles, also referred to as the Windward Islands, situated in the south of the Caribbean (Burton, 2009). Some of the more well-known islands of the Lesser Antilles are Barbados, Martinique, Aruba and Curacao (Premdas, 1996).

Due to being colonised by the United Kingdom and many European countries, such as Spain, France and the Netherlands, the Caribbean consists of diverse ethnic groups who originated from elsewhere, such as from African slaves, White settlers, planters and administrators from Europe (Cohen, 1998). British and European practices are present in the political, educational and legal aspects of the society. British and European practices were often seen by many as superior and the most appropriate way to live life (Bauer, 2018). However, the Caribbean culture is also embedded in traditions and practices related to food, language and celebrations (Burton, 2009). Caribbean people have their own multi-cultural identities, balancing between Western culture and the Caribbean.

Premdas (1996) states that due to the diversity within the Caribbean there is not one distinct Caribbean cultural identity; rather, there is an amalgamation of many cultural identities. However, despite the variations, many Caribbean islands and Caribbean people share some of the same cultural practices and historical experiences, such as colonisation (Burton, 2009). African-Caribbean people, in particular those who have direct ancestry from African slaves have contributed to the formation of the Caribbean Creole culture. The Caribbean Creole culture is reflected in the food, dance, music and religion of this group of people (Crawford, 2004). There is no single shared language spoken by all Caribbean people. Rather, Caribbean people speak different languages, including English and patois, the latter often being used to express deeper and more meaningful feelings that cannot be articulated via the English language (Premdas, 1996).

The Caribbean is religiously diverse; however, Christianity is the main religion practised throughout the islands. When the British and Europeans came to the Caribbean they brought their own religious beliefs and practices. For example, the Spanish, Dutch, Irish and French brought Roman Catholicism to the Caribbean, whereas the United Kingdom brought Protestantism (Burton, 2009). Arguably, Christianity, like many religions and

faiths, is underpinned by traditional views and practices, in particular the importance of family life, traditional family structures and procreation. Some of these religious views are in line with pronatalist ideas, advocating for marriage between a man and a woman to be considered the only union in which to have children (Premdas, 1996). Intolerance of relationships and practices outside of traditional religious views are often evidenced in the law and policies of some Caribbean islands; for example, The Buggery Law that prohibits homosexual relationships regardless of age-based limits (Gaskins, 2013).

#### **2.4.2 African-Caribbean women's migration to the United Kingdom and the impact on family relationships**

Currently, the majority of people from the Caribbean community in the United Kingdom are from a Jamaican background (Office of National Statistics, 2011). However, the Caribbean population in the United Kingdom is diverse, with people coming from Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, and Anguilla (Office of National Statistics, 2011). Peach (1991) describes the migration from the Caribbean as a hierarchical dispersion, starting in the larger islands like Jamaica, then Barbados, followed by the Leeward Islands and the Windward Islands.

In the 2011 Census (Office for National Statistics), the total population of the Caribbean community in the United Kingdom was 592,825. The majority of Caribbean people in the United Kingdom reside in London, with Birmingham and Manchester having the second and third largest Caribbean populations respectively. These larger cities attracted migrant groups because they offered a greater opportunity to access better education and employment. Once the Caribbean population had been established in a specific city, this inevitably attracted more Caribbean people due to familiarity, togetherness and family and friendship connections as well as the potential for mutual support (Phillips and Phillips, 1998).

A large number of Caribbean migrants came to the United Kingdom during the Second World War due to the labour shortage resulting from British people serving in the armed forces. There were varied job opportunities for Caribbean migrants who often worked in the hospitals, factories and railways (Bryon, 1999). One of the earliest, largest and best known migrations of African-Caribbean people was on the SS *Empire Windrush* which arrived on 22 June 1948 in Tilbury, London, with an estimated 492 passengers on board from Jamaica (Glass, 1960). Men tended to migrate first and then were followed by their wives and then their children. However, a minority of single African-Caribbean women also migrated (Bryon, 1999). The accounts of women's migration experiences have been neglected in the literature. Earlier literature by Pessar (1986) argued that the term migrant carried masculine connotations, and the migrant was often described as the male sojourner who leaves his homeland to seek better life opportunities abroad, while his dependent wife and children remain in the family home until they reunite (Pessar, 1986; Stahl, 1988). This view supported dominant Western ideology at the time regarding traditional gender roles. However, women have always taken part in and played an active role in the facilitation of migration. Women would often support their husbands and their own children as well as look after the children of relatives who had migrated until they returned. As Baldwin and Mortley (2016) argued, as women have a dominant role in the home, such as looking after and caring for their children and families, this put them in an ideal position to offer assistance and support as well as to help organise migratory moves. Women also played a role in helping in the settlement of their husbands and other family members (Baldwin and Mortley, 2016). They were also involved in forming and maintaining social support and networks, which brought African-Caribbean people and communities together (Barrow, 1996).

Research has begun to explore the implications of migration in terms of parent and child attachments and family relationships. Many individuals and families who migrated to the United Kingdom from the Caribbean left their children behind initially so that they could find work and somewhere to live, then they later reunited (Arnold, 2006). Thus, parent and child separation was not an unusual practice in the Caribbean; however, migration often led to feelings of loss and abandonment for the children left behind (Arnold, 2006).

Parents of children left behind provided financial support to assist in the care of their children and maintained contact through letters, telephone calls and occasional visits. However, this did not prevent the emotional and psychological impact of migration. Studies have found that many children experienced emotional distress and behavioural difficulties due to receiving inadequate preparation for the separation, moving around to different caregivers and the long period of separation (Christiansen et al., 1982; Crawford-Brown, 1997; Douglin, 1995; Evans and Davies, 1997; Leo-Rhynie, 1997).

Recently, research has begun to explore the experiences of African-Caribbean adults left behind in the Caribbean as children and who were later reunited with their parents. The findings reveal that reunions usually took place about ten years after separation; therefore, when the children and their mothers were reunited they did not know each other and found it difficult to bond (Arnold, 2006). Reunited participants expected to have a loving relationship with their mothers; however, they felt that their British born siblings were treated better and loved more by their mothers (Arnold, 2006). Overall, the research has found that long separations and the new additions to the family impacted on the success of reunions and resettlement. The children's experiences of loss, broken attachments, separation and readjustment also impacted on family dynamics and relationships with their family when reunited (Arnold, 2006; Smith et al., 2004). The emotional distress experienced throughout the reunion and resettlement often continued into adulthood and



impacted on the women's experiences as adults. For example, the women shared that they had difficulties trusting others and forming secure attachments in adulthood (Arnold, 2006; Smith et al., 2004).

Some studies have also begun to examine the experiences of the mothers who left their children behind in the Caribbean. For example, an earlier study by Robertson (1975) found that the mothers never stopped thinking about their children, often feeling guilty about leaving them behind. Some of the mothers believed that their stay in the United Kingdom would be temporary; therefore, they would reunite with the child shortly after. Similarly, Russell-Brown's (1997) study into Jamaican mothers who left their first-born child in Jamaica to migrate found that these mothers believed that they would reunite with their children successfully, with few difficulties. The study found that some of these mothers had an idealised view regarding a mother and child relationship, not realising that separation, loss and broken attachments could impact on their relationship. Russell-Brown's (1997) study highlighted that mothers were unprepared for their children becoming attached to their caregivers and the changes in their relationships with their children.

#### **2.4.3 The early experiences and development of the African-Caribbean community in the United Kingdom**

African-Caribbean migrants to the United Kingdom frequently experienced racial discrimination on individual, structural and institutional levels. For example, many African-Caribbean migrants were unlikely to obtain employment and appropriate housing. They also frequently experienced verbal and physical racially motivated attacks (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). Despite the schemes to recruit African-Caribbean people to work in the United Kingdom in the late 1940s, when they came to the United Kingdom, racial discrimination prevented many of them from finding employment and jobs (Glass, 1960).

African-Caribbean migrants were prohibited from visiting public places and social settings and they found that many pubs, shops, educational settings and churches would not allow 'Black' people onto their premises (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). Their White counterparts believed that the newly arrived migrants had stolen the local jobs from the White British community (Peach, 1991), as housing and jobs were in short supply following the war. This shortage led to some of the first clashes between the African-Caribbean and White communities (Glass, 1960).

The tensions between both the African-Caribbean and White communities in the United Kingdom got worse throughout the 1950s, and this led to high profile riots in cities including London, Birmingham and Nottingham. Racially motivated attacks in the London area of Notting Hill by some of the White community led to the creation of the Notting Hill Carnival in 1959. Phillips and Phillips (1998) state, that this was a positive response by the Caribbean community. Some of the racism and intolerance that many African-Caribbean people experienced was driven by anti-immigration movements, including Oswald Mosely's Union Movement, the White Defence League and the National Labour Party (Bryon, 1999). These groups often held gatherings, set up petitions and posted leaflets with slogans such as 'Keep Britain White'. Influenced by this, the Teddy Boys would often physically and verbally attack the African-Caribbean community (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). Many African-Caribbean people experienced discrimination by the police; therefore, most of the racist attacks would not be reported or investigated.

In 1968, the Conservative Cabinet member Enoch Powell gave a speech known as the 'Rivers of Blood' in Birmingham. This speech focused on immigration and racial issues in the United Kingdom and was alleged to have been based on the opinions of White working class British people who felt African-Caribbean migrants were a threat to 'our' women, jobs, houses and school places (Peach, 1991). The speech described migrants as dangerous

because they would always remain aliens in the United Kingdom and were unwanted (Bryon, 1999). Enoch Powell claimed that the United Kingdom would be overcrowded with African-Caribbean migrants and their descendants, and by the year 2000 they would form one tenth of the population (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). Enoch Powell believed that White Britons would become isolated and strangers in their own country (Peach, 1991).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s industrial disputes preceded a period of recession and widespread unemployment. Poverty, powerlessness, racism and discrimination experienced by the African Caribbean community led to further riots in areas with substantial numbers of African-Caribbean residents (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). These riots were known locally as the ‘uprisings’ and led to the Scarman report, commissioned by the Home Secretary at the time. The Scarman report identified both racial disadvantage and discrimination in the United Kingdom which needed to be addressed urgently to prevent these issues threatening the survival of British society (Peach, 1991). During this time there was an increase in racially motivated attacks on the African-Caribbean community (Bryon, 1999).

Social capital was, and still is, a useful concept to understand the development of the African-Caribbean community and its opportunities and resources. Social capital can be defined as “the values that people hold and the resources that they can access, which both result in and are the result of collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships” (Edwards et al., 2003: 2). Social capital created social support networks within the African-Caribbean community which were reflected in the development of self-help groups. This was a practical solution for the African-Caribbean community as it relied on African-Caribbean people working together to find their own solutions (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). Self-help groups addressed unmet needs in the African-Caribbean community as well as enabling its members to assume control over their lives and

community. Self-help promoted pride, togetherness and community spirit as it brought together people who were in a similar position (Bryon, 1999). For example, in 1966 the African Caribbean Self Help Organisation (ACSHO) in Birmingham was established and promoted self-reliance by developing economic and educational institutions. ACSHO also helped to tackle and address issues such as discrimination, racism, unemployment and low educational attainment. The self-help groups also enabled African-Caribbean people to socialise with each other through parties, festivals, carnivals and coach trips, which helped bring the community together. In addition, self-help groups also focused on addressing isolation, affirming values and beliefs (Rex and Moore, 1967).

The lack of available housing in post-war Britain affected many African-Caribbean migrants. Many self-help groups and African-Caribbean organisations helped many African-Caribbean people to rent flats and buy their own homes (Glass, 1960). The Harambee organisation which was established in 1972 supported homeless Black people in the Birmingham community. The organisation also built a hostel and flats for young homeless people. Harambee means 'working together' in Swahili and was aimed at promoting Black identity and dignity (Rex and Moore, 1967).

The cost of migration from the Caribbean to the United Kingdom was nearly £100 and this meant that the majority of African-Caribbean migrants came to the United Kingdom in debt (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). African-Caribbean migrants needed to pay off their travel costs and were also expected to send financial remittances to their families back home. These financial commitments often put extreme pressure upon African-Caribbean migrants to find work immediately once in the United Kingdom (Bryon, 1999). African-Caribbean organisations were developed in order to address some of these financial issues faced by African-Caribbean people, helping them to access statutory services and welfare. For example, the Afro-Caribbean Association was established during the early post-war

period and provided advice on welfare, immigration, health, housing, benefits, education and employment.

Due to the arrival of many children from the Caribbean into the post-war United Kingdom, schools and educational establishments often felt unable to meet the needs of these pupils. Government education policies and the attitudes of teachers contributed to African-Caribbean children being seen as a 'problem', rather than addressing the negative stereotyping and racism that contributed to the problems that many African-Caribbean children faced (Coard, 1971). Further, labelling African-Caribbean pupils as 'educationally subnormal' led to many pupils being isolated, discriminated against and experiencing low self-esteem and low achievement (Coard, 1971).

Self-help groups like ACSHO developed supplementary schools to tackle these issues experienced by Caribbean pupils and also helped many Caribbean children to gain qualifications outside of mainstream education. The supplementary schools held classes in English, maths and African history. Mainstream schools did not teach Black History, therefore it was taught in the supplementary schools to help to promote a positive self-image and identity for African-Caribbean children and the wider community.

#### **2.4.4 First- and second-generation African-Caribbean people**

When African-Caribbean people migrated to Western countries they often brought many of their cultural and religious norms, traditions and practices with them (for example, music, language and food), mixing their culture with the new culture in order to sustain their identity but at the same time to fit it (Chamberlain, 1998). Many diasporic communities are described as having a mixture of sameness intertwined with differences, often having fluid diasporic memberships (Chamberlain, 1998). According to Hall (2001), being African-

Caribbean involves the continuous struggle of identity reconstruction due to the dislocation and relocation of individuals and groups.

Once in the United Kingdom, first-generation migrants sustained and maintained their African-Caribbean identity by sharing their migration stories. They were a point of conversation and connection, allowing them to pass on cultural traditions, norms and expectations to the second and subsequent generations. Crawford (2004:98) states: “Diasporic identities are produced and reproduced through the collective memory of a group of people.” Cultural bonding takes place through migrants’ accounts (King, 2000; Reynolds, 2008) as well as through people’s memories of the food, music and language, and sights and sounds (Premdas, 1996). Similarly, Reynolds (2008) suggests that diasporic identities are produced and reproduced through the memories of one’s ‘homeland’ and beliefs about ‘returning home’. The imagined ‘homeland’ is often viewed in a nostalgic and idealised way: a place in people’s hearts that is kept alive through conversations (Reynolds, 2008). However, for many going back home was not and has never been a possibility due to the commitments and ties they had in their ‘new home’, such as their children, houses and jobs (Reynolds, 2008).

Despite not being able to return home, many African-Caribbean people maintain contact with family and have connections to their homeland through transnational activities and cultural remittance (Burman, 2002; Levitt, 2001). Cultural remittance includes buying a house back home, celebrating national holidays and events and displaying cultural artefacts as well as sending money and items to family members back home (Reynolds and Zontini, 2006). Goulbourne and Chamberlain (2001: 42) found that:

“Geographical distance is no barrier to being ‘close’. Family and respondents in their study stressed the importance of transnational links in maintaining the ‘tightness’ of the emotional bonds, and the level of ‘trust’ expected and experienced between family members.”

Cultural remittance and transnational activities strengthen cultural identity and are also a way of keeping ties and family together (Reynolds and Zontini, 2006). However, migrants also use these strategies and activities as a coping mechanism to manage feelings of isolation and not belonging in their new country (Burman, 2002; Levitt, 2001).

When studying the children of African-Caribbean migrants, qualitative research has been used to examine the complex accounts of the multifaceted and dynamic nature of their identity. For example, Reynolds (2008) argued that the 'myth of return' has shaped the identity of many second-generation African-Caribbean people who often felt connected to the Caribbean by hearing their parents' stories of their time spent in the Caribbean. As a result, a number of second-generation African-Caribbean people have chosen to identify themselves as African-Caribbean or consider the Caribbean as their spiritual or cultural home, despite being born in the United Kingdom (Reynolds, 2008). Reynolds argued that 'the myth of return' home has given second-generation African-Caribbean people a strong sense of cultural identity and affiliation to the African-Caribbean community.

Reynolds' (2008) study also found that many second-generation African-Caribbean people in the United Kingdom felt that they had not completely integrated into the United Kingdom due to the on-going racial discrimination and inequality that they faced, which impacted on their socio-economic success. This has led to some second-generation African-Caribbean people questioning the meaning of 'home' and dreaming of returning to their parents' 'homeland' which they believed would offer them a better quality of life.

Other researchers have argued that there are limits to African-Caribbean identity among second-generation African-Caribbean people. For example, Layton-Henry (2003) argued that second- and third-generation African-Caribbean people do not sustain their cultural identity and transnational activities and many first-generation African-Caribbean people

have a weak commitment to sustaining them, too. Layton-Henry's (2003) study found that that the cost of travelling to and from the Caribbean has made it difficult to visit regularly and to sustain and maintain cultural links. Layton-Henry (2003) also argued that by marrying British partners, second-generation African-Caribbean people have assimilated into the British culture, which he states is in large contrast to other Black and Ethnic Minority groups who continue to marry within their own communities.

Doswell's (2001) study examined intergenerational ties and tensions regarding the different goals and expectations prevalent in each generation. It found that the younger African-Caribbean generation had higher aspirations regarding social and economic success when compared to their parents and grandparents. The younger generation also felt uncertainty about their cultural identity. For example, some participants had little or no connection to the Caribbean but at the same time they did not identify themselves as being British. Doswell (2001: 244) comments:

“Black young people, born in Britain, are likely to feel disconnected from both the African-Caribbean community and unwelcomed by the White community and thereby suffer a sense of cultural anomie. This is exacerbated by the racism inherent in society which denies them the opportunity to forge a necessary, new and distinctive identity as an emerging British Black citizen.”

Doswell's (2001) study suggested that due to having higher aspirations and goals than their parents and grandparents, as well as their cultural identification, the younger generation have rejected their parents' and grandparents' cultural heritage and become culturally disconnected from their family.

#### **2.4.5 Contemporary constructions of motherhood amongst African-Caribbean women**

There is limited research on African-Caribbean mothers and their family relationships in the United Kingdom; however, the literature and research available describe African-



Caribbean mothers and their families in a negative way due to their cultural traditions and social-structural issues (Reynolds, 2005). For example, some researchers have argued that due to significant numbers of single parent (mother) households in African-Caribbean families, they are more individualised, which has fragmented traditional family structures and weakened family ties (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, Reynolds (2005) argued that in African-Caribbean history and communities, matriarchal households are a deep-rooted tradition and are positively received. Within matriarchal households a loving and strong mother, aunt or grandmother takes on the caring role and responsibilities of her family. However, matriarchal households do not always negate the presence of fathers and/or males in the family home. Some of the males often work away from home; thus the women take a more active role in terms of raising the children and taking on more of the responsibility for the family economically.

Nevertheless, more recently, the image of matriarchal households in the African-Caribbean community in the United Kingdom often refers to young single mothers who raise their children without any support from the children's fathers. These young single mothers are also often depicted negatively by the media and are separated into two categories: "the superwoman and the baby mother" (Reynolds, 2005: 29). Reynolds (2005) explains that there is a socio-economic aspect to how these mothers are viewed and characterised. Firstly, the 'superwoman' is seen as an educated professional who had no choice but to become a single parent due to a lack of suitable and available Black men in professional roles. Conversely, the 'baby mother' describes single mothers who are uneducated and reliant on welfare benefits to take care of them and their children (Reynold, 2005). The 'superwoman' image portrays the struggle that many educated and professional African-Caribbean women experience in terms of the lack of opportunities and choices available. However, the 'baby mother' is considered as one of the only worthwhile routes to take in

life to acquire financial gain without the support of their children's fathers (Reynolds, 2005).

Within these images, African-Caribbean women are often portrayed as hypersexual and as a result they are assumed to have too many children (Coleman et al., 2016). Black women live and engage daily in a society where others hold negative beliefs and stereotypes about their sexuality, which results in stigma and othering (Reynolds, 2005). However, qualitative analysis shows that Black women are critical of these negative stereotypes and hypersexualised depictions of themselves in media. Though Black women reported feeling no personal connection to these negative images, they did, however, express concern as to how they might reflect on Black women as a whole and the implications of this (Coleman et al., 2016).

The stereotypes that have emerged regarding the sexuality of Black women often reflect Black women as a whole; in contrast, White women's sexuality or sexual behaviour reflects negatively only on the individual (Collins, 2005; hooks, 1981). The juxtaposition of Black women's sexual behaviour and sexuality with gender norms that view White women as pure, modest and as having self-control results in Black women being seen negatively and positioned on the margins of society (Collins, 2000). Indeed, the social constructions of Black women's sexuality are founded on racist and sexist myths and negative stereotypes that Black women are not sexually pure and innocent (Collins, 2005; hooks, 1981). It is from these stereotypes and myths that Black women learn about and understand the value of their sexuality within society (Stephens and Few, 2007). A qualitative study undertaken by Weekes (2002) found that African-Caribbean women living in Britain desired to be seen as respectable and pure, which are characteristics more often associated with White women. Similarly, Hine (1995) argues that Black women have created a culture of dissemblance in order to reject and suppress their sexuality to avoid

stigma. Black women face unique consequences regarding their sexuality as their experiences are specific to the intersection of their racial and gender identities (Collins, 2000).

These views and depictions of Black women have often led to African-Caribbean mothers and families being criticised for being ‘dysfunctional’ as they fail to conform to the traditional images of womanhood and family life (Sharpe, 1996). Reynolds (2005) suggests that these images portray African-Caribbean families at crisis, blaming the mothers for many social issues such as poverty and teenage pregnancy. There is a risk that these depictions may become internalised, impacting on African-Caribbean women’s self-esteem and views on family life and motherhood (Reynolds, 2005).

## **2.5 Synthesis and rationale of the study**

### **2.5.1 Synthesis**

One of the omissions in the review of research on ageing without children is that only a few studies have recognised the diverse ways in which women may end up as ageing without children. It has not always been made clear what definitions are being used to describe individuals living without children. By and large, research has failed to make a distinction between those who never had children, and the diverse reasons for that, those who lost children (for example, through death, adoption or other forms of separation) and those who have step-children or relationships with children that could be constructed as ‘parentlike’ (Connidis and McMullin, 1996; Keizer et al., 2008; Wenger, 2001). This results in childless adults being grouped together as an homogenous group and their individual experience being undifferentiated. As discussed, most of the studies failed to acknowledge the different contexts in which women age without children and the meanings they might attach to their experience.

Studies invariably do not use a life course perspective, which limits their potential to consider the impact of life course influences on the contexts and pathways to ageing without children. Little is known about how a range of key life events and circumstances throughout the life course shape individuals' experiences and context of childlessness in older age, or how the circumstances of being childless may influence the resources that older people can bring into older age.

Further, the studies examined indicated that women and men have distinctive pathways into childlessness. However, it is not clear why and how gender shapes the experiences of individuals who are ageing without children. For example, do traditional gender norms and pronatalist views have an impact on experiences of childlessness? Another area that is overlooked is how the construction of gendered identities influences and shapes how individuals define themselves. For example, do men and women have different ways of defining and understanding their experiences of not having children?

The available research on ageing without children focuses on the experiences of men and women from White British and/or European middle-class backgrounds. Studies remain largely homogenous. One of the oversights in the literature reviewed is that there are few studies that reflect the diversity of older age and specifically which include Black and Ethnic Minority groups in the sample. Little is known about Black and Ethnic Minority groups' pathways and contexts to ageing without children. There is a lack of consideration of the cultural, social and religious contexts of individuals who are ageing without children and whether ageing without children for Black and Minority Ethnic women adds a potential further layer of disadvantage in older age.

There are some methodological limitations in contemporary research on ageing without children. First, studies tend to be descriptive and are not informed by a theoretical framework (Connidis and McMullin, 1996; Dykstra and Wagner, 2009; Wenger, 2001), and it is not clear what assumptions underpin and inform the studies or what the researchers' standpoints are. This is needed to understand why a study was conducted in a particular way and its direction, and to contextualise the findings. Some of the studies reviewed used a qualitative approach or a mixed method approach to gather in-depth accounts regarding the experiences of childless people. However, studies that relied on surveys and questionnaires to produce quantitative data to provide information about larger numbers of people, such as that of Keizer et al. (2008), found that the use of a questionnaire with both closed and multiple choice questions limited the possibility of identifying whether participants had step-children and adopted children. Moreover, the use of survey data reduced the potential for hearing the voices of older people who are ageing without children and who have largely been excluded from the research. Therefore, there was no context in regard to some of the findings and no narratives to explain the findings.

The research on younger African childless adults examined how individuals experience childlessness in cultural, social and religious contexts (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Tabong and Adongo, 2013). This was helpful in providing an insight into and understanding of the role of the religion, culture and society in which individuals live and how they shape individual experiences of not having children. The findings from the review showed that the influence of pronatalist beliefs and traditional gender norms was profound and had a direct impact on the experiences of those who did not have children (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Tabong and Adongo, 2013). This can be seen in the negative experiences of childless women that are documented in the reviewed studies (see 2.3.1).

The research within the field of younger African childless adults is predominantly informed by an interpretivist epistemological and qualitative approach, such as in-depth interviews, as they are one way to capture individual lived experiences in detail. This confirmed the importance of qualitative research as a way to understand the interplay between an individual's environments and their experiences of childlessness.

Another area of contention is that the theoretical perspectives and concepts that inform the research on younger African childless adults are not always articulated or are not clearly stated and there is a tendency to report findings descriptively. Although the term 'childless' is dominant in research, there it remains a contested term as there is no agreement as to what constitutes childless and little consideration is given to the different contexts to childlessness. Childless people were mainly seen as homogeneous, with little distinction made between different groups. For example, childless adults were often described as being infertile or childless, or both terms were used interchangeably (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Larsen, 1995; Tabong and Adongo, 2013; Weinger, 2009). All these terms are used very loosely and did not go into detail about the contexts of childlessness. A primary difficulty in conceptualising the terms used relates to how childlessness might be defined, understood and then measured. The lack of definitions created a number of difficulties in terms of understanding the experiences and context of childlessness.

Conversely, some studies, such as Ibisomi and Mudege's (2014) study, distinguished between involuntary and voluntary childless adults in Nigeria. The study also recognised other forms of parenting or childlessness, such as social parenthood by people who could not biologically have their own children but who adopted and raised other people's children in order to maintain their place in the community (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014). Ibisomi and Mudege's (2014) study used a broad definition of voluntary childlessness, including individuals who do not have children because they chose to stay in a relationship

with an infertile partner. From the literature review on younger childless African adults, it is evident that multiple factors, from both individual and societal perspectives, are likely to influence and shape how childlessness is experienced and understood.

When considering the literature on the African-Caribbean community, specifically their earlier experiences following migration, I found there to be very limited research into African-Caribbean women's personal stories and accounts of migration. Research focuses mainly on adult male migration and experiences. Arnold (2006) and Smith et al. (2004) focus on how childhood migration from the Caribbean impacted on some Caribbean women's relationships and attachments in adulthood. The current research shows that the separation of mother and child during migration impacted on their bond and attachment and led to feelings of abandonment and anger for some. However, one of the oversights is that these studies have not considered the role of migration in terms of the women's journeys to ageing without children. African-Caribbean people are one of the oldest non-White ethnic groups in the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics, 2011); however, we know relatively little about present-day African-Caribbean women after their migration experiences and their contexts to ageing without children. Therefore this area warrants further attention in literature and research.

One of the weaknesses in the studies on the African-Caribbean community is that they do not state the theoretical perspectives that inform the research; thus, the studies' findings tend to be descriptive. Further, an area that is overlooked in the research on African-Caribbean identity is how identity changes, shifts and is reinvented in later life and the role that migration, upbringing and socialisation plays in this. Arguably such studies would be useful in revealing how people construct and reconstruct their identities and how this upholds across the life course. Moreover, there are no studies that research into African-

Caribbean women specifically in terms of their migration, identity, childlessness and present circumstances.

From the literature reviewed, it appears that motherhood and having children have been constructed as a natural practice and it is assumed that African-Caribbean women will have multiple children. Research remains silent on what, if any, the consequences will be for African-Caribbean women who challenge this dominant discourse by not having children. In contemporary media, African-Caribbean mothers are portrayed negatively and hypersexually (Reynolds, 2005). An area that is missing in the research is the exploration of the impact of these views of African-Caribbean motherhood and how they may have shaped ageing African-Caribbean women's decisions and views on motherhood and childbearing.

### **2.5.2 Conclusion and the formulation of research areas**

In light of the omissions identified in the current knowledge and research, my study will consider the following: individual women's pathways and contexts to ageing without children, including cultural, social and religious contexts and what being childless means to each participant. This will ensure that the women's individual experiences and voices are heard and recognised. It also provides the women with the opportunity to articulate a discourse of ageing without children that positions their cultural, religious and social experiences at the centre. Furthermore, as my study is underpinned by a life course perspective this will enable me to understand how life course experiences and key transitions have shaped the women's subsequent pathways to ageing without children. While life course approaches have begun to recognise the importance of intersectionality and ethnicity in terms of being a continuous thread in peoples' lives, Black and Ethnic Minority women have been absent from life course accounts and approaches on ageing. As there are no reported studies that examine African-Caribbean women ageing without



children across their life course, my study will make a novel contribution to the current research. It will also provide a valuable insight into an area we know little about.

Due to the current omissions in research, this study is informed by a theoretical underpinning and uses appropriate methods to gather detailed narrative accounts of the women's life course experiences. As already discussed in the introduction, my study is underpinned by a qualitative Black Feminist approach as it allows the women to be at the centre of the study, focusing on detailed accounts of their lives and experiences as well enabling me as an African-Caribbean woman and researcher to be intertwined in the research. As research on ageing without children has yet to use Black Feminist Standpoint Theory to underpin it, this study offers a new contribution. Conducting a qualitative Black Feminist study that examines the experiences of African-Caribbean women ageing without children not only makes my research unique, but it also provides an insight into an area that is under researched.

The overarching research area and title is: **Examining the impact of life course experiences on the pathways and contexts to African-Caribbean women ageing without children.**

Based on gaps in the literature the broad goals for my study have been translated into the following research areas:

- (1) Culture expressed in terms of the participants' beliefs and cultural identity.
- (2) How participants' beliefs and cultural identity and life course experiences have shaped their contexts and pathways to ageing without children.

# Chapter Three: Methodology

## 3.1 Overview

The development of research arises from a perception about the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship between the knower and what can be known (epistemology) and the most suitable approach to discover reality (methodology) (Annells, 1996). Given the total lack of research exploring the experience of African- Caribbean women who are ageing without children, I was keen to develop a research approach that created an opportunity to explore individual social worlds and realities as well as to analyse and interpret their individual accounts of their life course that included ageing without children. As this study aimed to reveal the lived experiences of African-Caribbean women including ageing without children, by hearing their views and stories, the use of interpretivist, qualitative, Feminist and Black Feminist Standpoint approaches were considered to be the most appropriate approaches to use and to underpin the study.

Following on from Chapter Two, this chapter will begin by outlining the philosophical and theoretical approaches which underpinned and informed this research study. First, I outline the paradigm that underpins the study, specifically, interpretivism, and my ontological and epistemological stance in relation to this. I then discuss why this approach was the most suitable for this research study, which includes a discussion about the implications of my role and my aim to be reflexive throughout the research process. I then discuss the research methodology – Black Feminist Standpoint Theory, Feminist, qualitative and a life course perspective – outlining how such approaches have helped to shape the way I engaged and interacted with the participants and how I conducted the research. My aim is to make the process I undertook to carry out this research as transparent as possible, thus reflexive practice is integrated throughout the chapter.

### **3.2 Interpretivist approach**

The basic notion of the interpretivist approach is described by Ngozwana (2018), who states that interpretivism discovers how different people interpret their own reality and the social world in which they live. It aims to understand peoples' experiences from their own perspective (Chilisa and Preece, 2005).

Ontological and epistemological positions of interpretivists are that reality is subjective and differs from person to person (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). People can, therefore, have the same experience and have a different meaning and understanding of it (Crotty, 1998). From this perspective, reality can only be understood from the standpoint of the individual (Cohen et al., 2007) and these experiences cannot be generalised into one common reality. One of the strengths of this stance is that multiple perspectives can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the circumstances under consideration. An interpretivist paradigm provided a framework that allowed me as the researcher to gain a deep insight into the social worlds and realities of African-Caribbean women who are ageing without children.

### **3.3 What does interpretivism look like in this study?**

As well as wanting to explore African-Caribbean women's experiences of ageing without children, it was also important that their participation in the research study was valued and that they were at the centre of their own experience. In line with the interpretivist and Black Feminist Standpoint Theory, I was keen to ensure a genuine reflection and interpretation of the women's voices. In order to understand the participants' experiences and social worlds, I had to immerse myself in their worlds throughout the research process. I designed the study and used tools that allowed me to achieve this. This involved

listening, asking questions, understanding and observing their body language and gestures (see Chapter Four, 4.8).

Ray (2001) states that knowledge is not one-dimensional, where data and information can be taken from a participant and the researcher takes the information and remains passive and invisible in the research process. From an interpretivist perspective, knowledge is regarded as a co-production between the researcher and the participants who are actively constructing the accounts together (Shakespeare et al., 1991). Therefore, my role as the researcher could not be ignored or overlooked (Gubrium and Sankar, 1994). Through its recognition of axiology, the interpretivist paradigm acknowledges that social research is value-bound and value-laden and that researchers are influenced by their values (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). As a researcher, my cultural beliefs and identity influenced and structured the research process and the interpretation of the narrative accounts (Charmaz, 1990). I was also aware that the meetings and interviews between me and the participants were constructed for the purpose of the study and thus they were not a ‘natural’ encounter. It was important to be aware that my visibility, who I am (my role) and my intervention (interview) could impact the accounts given and how they were shared by the participants.

### **3.4 How my identity influenced the study and my interpretation of the participants’ experiences**

I stated earlier, in the introduction, that I am a third-generation African-Caribbean woman. I was also aware that my own professional background in social work and underpinning values regarding supporting and helping to empower people and offering interventions to address areas of concerns shaped my interactions and approach throughout the research process. Based on my own identity, beliefs and professional background, I was aware that my own voice, values and background were intertwined with the research.

Taking a reflexive approach to the research helped me to acknowledge and consider how my identity may impact on the interviews with the participants (see Chapter Four, 4.2). Reflexivity within a research study is a constant process of awareness and self-reflection about the researcher's actions, views, feelings and perceptions (Finlay, 1998). Reflexivity improves transparency with regards to all the steps taken throughout the research process, but it also allows the researcher to make any changes throughout the research process to ensure the credibility of the study (Finlay, 1998; Finlay and Ballinger, 2006). Ray (2001) stated that there is a significant relationship between social construction and reflexivity which requires researchers to be open and honest about their assumptions, values and histories as well as the relationship between them and the participants. A part of this process meant that I asked myself reflexive questions such as: How can I represent ageing childless African-Caribbean women's experiences and voices accurately? How does my own social world (including values, beliefs and cultural identity) and interpretation of the accounts shared impact on how the study is understood? How does my own identity impact on the relationship with participants? What can I do throughout the research process to better understand the ageing childless African-Caribbean women's experiences? By asking such questions, I was able to be honest and open about my role and how this shaped the study.

Increasingly, attention has been given to making transparent aspects of the research that did not go as well as the researcher intended them to and to consider factors that impacted on the research process (Finlay, 1998; Finlay and Ballinger, 2006). There is a moral and professional responsibility when planning and carrying out research to consider and plan for ethical issues that may transpire during the research process (Ray, 2001). Villenas (1996) suggests that when researchers are studying people from their own community, a community that may be perceived as a marginalised group, the researcher may experience

ethical dilemmas where she has to balance being a member of a marginalised group – whom she does not want to further marginalise through the research process – and at the same time a member of a dominant group. This was a consideration that I had to take into account throughout the fieldwork and research process.

Being an African-Caribbean woman and living without children meant that I had a personal connection with the study and had formed my own views about the research and ‘researched’, as stated previously. Although I listened to and received the accounts shared by the individual participants, my understanding of what was shared was influenced by my own beliefs and background. I would, at times, make assumptions about the participants’ experiences or pre-empt what the participants would say or how they would say it. I assumed that I knew what they were experiencing as I believed we had experienced similar issues or had similar lived experiences. I also assumed that my values and those of the participants would coalesce, without consideration of the fact that they may conflict, which at times they did. Commentators such as Moffat (1992) state that it is important not to overstate familiarity and assume a homogenous culture. The experiences of Black women are unique and multifaceted; therefore, sharing the same cultural identity and gender did not mean that I would be able to understand the participants better than someone else would (Few et al., 2003).

Moreover, it was apparent that my professional background in social work heightened my desire to want to help and support the participants but also to resolve some of the participants’ experiences. It became apparent that this may have caused a potential conflict as my role in this situation was not to help and support these women and the women would not be expecting this of me (Chapter Four, 4.2).

Throughout the research process, I realised that I had to become more reflexive and critically aware, not just about my identity but also about my role as a researcher and the theoretical underpinnings of the study. In line with Black Feminist Standpoint Theory and a reflective and interpretivist approach, I wanted to ensure that my own views and beliefs did not lead to any biases and/or distort the participants' narrative accounts. I also did not want to further oppress the participants by taking away their power by telling their stories and truths for them. In relation to the Black Feminist Standpoint Theory, Mirza (1997) argues that as many Black women face oppression and discrimination, they are in a position to reveal rather than hide certain truths that can lead to new knowledge and understanding about their lives and experience. It became very apparent throughout the research process that I could either aid or hinder in 'revealing' certain truths due to my own role and identity. It was imperative that I helped to reveal the women's truths by ensuring that their voices came to the forefront, as opposed to mine.

I was able to take some practical steps to address some of the ethical issues that I was facing which I discuss in Chapter Four, 4.2. As my ideas, values and identity are integral to who I am, they could not be simply removed or managed by a change in behaviour or implementing a one-off practical step. Rather, I had to continuously be aware of my actions and role throughout the whole research process and ask myself difficult questions about who I am and how this influenced my research in practice (Ray, 2001).

### **3.5 Black Feminist Standpoint Theory**

Black Feminist Standpoint Theory articulates the standpoint of and for Black women. It provides a framework through which the lived experiences of Black women can be understood within a society that is dominated by White people (Etienne, 2014). Reynolds (2005) argues that Black Feminist Standpoint Theory strives to position Black women at

the centre so that we can assume an active role in our own lives. The fundamental notion of any standpoint theory is that individuals who belong to an oppressed group, like Black women, have distinct and special types of knowledge due to their subordinate positions in society (Mirza, 1997). The knowledge gained from their standpoint can be used to help Black women strive towards political and social empowerment, achieved through a raised group consciousness (Collins, 2000).

There are several assumptions that underpin Black Feminist Standpoint Theory. First, it is created by Black women and their voices and experiences are at the core. Second, as Black women may share similar experiences based on their race and gender there will be some similarities of perception shared by Black women as a whole. Third, the differences in terms of Black women's age, nationality, class and sexual orientation may result in different expressions of these perceptions. Collins (2000) argues that while mutual experiences and understanding among Black women are essential aspects of Black Feminist Standpoint Theory, there is no assumption of sameness. Rather, the varied voices and experiences of individual Black women add to a more comprehensive understanding of all Black women (Collins, 1990). For this very reason, Black Feminist Standpoint Theory is highly compatible with the interpretivist paradigm that underpins this research and the aims of this study. Lastly, although Black women's standpoint exists, it may not be always recognised and/or valued by Black women themselves. Therefore, one of the roles of Black women academics and researchers like me is to ensure that the experiences of Black women are represented and present in contemporary debates about womanhood.

Self-definition and self-valuation are key features in Black Feminist Standpoint Theory. Self-definition involves challenging assumptions and myths that have resulted in stereotypical images of Black womanhood (Collins, 2000), whereas self-valuation aims to replace stereotypes and negative images of Black women with more positive and authentic



images. Black feminists have started to question the narratives about Black women and the credibility of those who are creating these narratives (Collins, 2000). There are limitations to Western and Eurocentric theories that seek to understand and define Black womanhood. For example, Black women tend to be measured by White, middle-class Western standards rather than being understood through the lens of their own worldviews and epistemologies (Reynolds, 2005). Collins (1990) argues that comparing Black women to Western standards of living results in Black women being oppressed, labelled and pathologised should they be unable to live up to those standards.

Racist and sexist ideologies permeate social systems and structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, being seen as natural and normal (Mirza, 1997). Gramsci (1971) argues that if hegemonic practices are built on Western standards and Eurocentric ways of seeing and thinking about the world, then one must not only question these knowledge claims but also ensure that we use other sources of knowledge. Black Feminist Standpoint Theory aims to reveal other ways of knowing that challenge the Western ideologies, dominant structures and hierarchies of power that result in the marginalisation and oppression of Black women. Black Feminist Standpoint Theory can be used to gather accounts and lived experiences of Black women by seeing them as a source of knowledge production about themselves (Collins, 1998). Defining themselves and their own lived experiences by using their own voices will help to empower Black women and challenge stereotypes and assumptions about them.

According to Collins (1990), knowledge about Black women can be gained through various forms of oppression. Systems of oppression lead to unique social positionings for Black women, which tend to be on the margins of society, from where they see and experience the world (Collins, 2000). Intersectionality helps us to understand how Black women's social identities can result in the oppression and disadvantages they face

(Warner, 2008). Black Feminist Standpoint Theory includes Black women who live between the intersections of culture, gender, sexuality, class, age and disability. Intersectionality also explores how these social identities interact with one another simultaneously (Warner, 2008). Early Black Feminist Standpoint Theory commentators, such as hooks (1984), argued that Black women's voices demonstrate both gendered and racial standpoints. Race and gender both influence how Black women view the world, and how we experience various truths (hooks, 1984).

Black Feminist researchers can use their social positioning to challenge Western ideology and draw attention to the experiences of Black women, uncovering aspects of reality that are often concealed and invisible. Collins (2000) refers to this as the outsider within. The outsider within refers to Black women who are in a privileged position due to being able to function within academia as researcher insiders and at the same time being outsiders who are decentred in the academic context because they are Black and women (Collins, 2000). Black Feminist Standpoint Theory therefore provides a powerful and efficient methodological approach for research by and about Black women.

Black Feminist Standpoint Theory does, however, raise a number of concerns. For example, as knowledge within Black Feminist Standpoint Theory is based on Black women's collective experience, diverse experiences of Black women are not always present. Only some Black women's voices and experiences come to the forefront and are used to represent all Black women, while others are silenced. Some of the main groups who tend to be silenced are Black women ageing without children, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Bi-sexual Black women and Black women with disabilities (Reynold, 2005).

Linked to the above concern is that Black Feminist Standpoint Theory's specialised knowledge stems from African-American women's experiences and voices which have led to the main production of knowledge about Black women (Reynolds, 2005). Arguably, African-Caribbean British women have a specialised knowledge which differs from that of African-American women. Thus, Reynolds (2005) argues that there is a need for a British-based Black Feminist Standpoint Theory which focuses on the experiences and voices of Black British women. Historically, there has been a lack of Black women's voices in research, particularly African-Caribbean women who are ageing without children. I demonstrated in my critical review of the literature on ageing without children that research remains homogeneous, failing to consider ethnic membership and cultural diversity. The available literature does not acknowledge these women's experiences; their standpoint is non-existent. By utilising Black Feminist Standpoint Theory in this current research, I seek to reveal the specialised knowledge held by British African-Caribbean women ageing without children, to enable these women to be involved in the debate about childlessness.

Another contention regarding Black Feminist Standpoint Theory is its claims that it aims to empower Black women who are deemed as oppressed, to improve their situation.

However, the existence of a Black Feminist Standpoint Theory does not necessarily mean that Black women will recognise its significance or see the potential that it has as a catalyst for empowerment and social change (Collins, 1990).

### **3.6 Older age/ageing and Feminist approaches**

Research on older age and ageing adults is often framed in binary ways, either as a decline or as positive and successful ageing narratives. The decline narrative focuses on the decline of an individual's body as they age, due to ill health and lack of mobility. Ageing

and becoming old is linked to loneliness, sadness, loss and dependency (Sandberg, 2013). These views reflect a common discourse of old age, in particular in relation to advanced old age (Gullette, 2003).

Research has often positioned older and/or ageing adults within storylines of health problems and losses (Allen and Wiles, 2013; Jones, 2006). Similarly, research on ageing without children traditionally has done the same. Earlier studies have focused on the impact of the absence of care and the consequences of ageing without children in later life (Aykan, 2003; Beckman and Houser, 1982; Cwikel et al., 2006). Discourses of old age have tended to depict older women without children as stigmatised ‘outsiders’ who burden health and social care services and the government’s expenditure (Allen and Wiles, 2013). On the other hand, older women with children are idealised as ‘insiders’, who have a good support network and kinship groups who care for them as they get older (Allen and Wiles, 2013). These images have been criticised for reinforcing negative images of older people and for failing to acknowledge a more positive and healthy experience of old age (Sandberg, 2013).

In an attempt to address this negative discourse and to acknowledge a more positive image of adults who are ageing, the concept of successful ageing has been introduced into social gerontology discourses and research. Successful ageing is linked with terms such as active, productive, youthful and autonomous (Sandberg, 2013). This narrative is also believed to suit the lifestyles of a new generation of older adults who are considered to be feeling younger, healthier and more active and who are living longer (Gilleard and Higgs, 2000). However, one of the main concerns regarding the discourse of successful ageing is that it values youth over old age.

I argue that this binary is insufficient for capturing and understanding the diverse experiences and complexities around old age and of older people. Some older adults may not fit into either binary or may fit into both. For example, some older women may experience declining health but at the same time they may be active, having a large social network. In regard to this current study, African-Caribbean women ageing without children may face unique experiences due to their age, cultural identity and being childless and their experiences of migration and racism. Being able to capture and understand the complexities that impact on individuals' experiences of ageing allows us to have a deeper understanding of the differences between ageing communities, what resources they bring into old age and how they age. The use of Feminist research has been a way to capture some of these complexities and unique experiences that older and ageing women face.

Feminist research is dedicated to hearing women speak, in their own words, about their own experiences. Anderson (2005) states that the role of a researcher is to listen to the women's voices and to encourage them to talk about their feelings and to explore what life is like for them. Reinharz and Davidman (1992) argue that having an honest and open conversation with women gives the researchers access to women's ideas, thoughts and lived experiences in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. This way of learning about older women can be considered as an antidote to years of disregarding and devaluing older women's ideas, accounts and experiences. Feminist researchers also seek to understand the experiences of women in a culture that is patriarchal and has dominant structures and hierarchies of power that result in the marginalisation and oppression of women (Anderson, 2005; Fraser and MacDougall, 2017). Reinharz and Davidman (1992) argue that Feminist researchers listen to women's experiences to identify ways to bring about change and to alter the subordinated position of women.

Feminist research underpins this current study to help challenge some of the dominant discourses and views held about women who are ageing without children and to help to provide a more representative and accurate image of their lives. It is also used to acknowledge the interplay between power and difference. The ageing African-Caribbean women in this study may have faced oppression not merely because they are women and ageing but because they are Black and childless. This in effect may lead to facing different types of oppressions and to power struggles that other groups of ageing women or childless women may not face. Although Feminist research is helpful in capturing the women's voices, lived experiences and oppression faced, there has been a relative absence of consideration of culture and ethnic differences in Feminist theories. Therefore, by using a Feminist approach in this study, I aim to address this absence and provide a contribution to the Feminist approach by exploring the experiences of African-Caribbean ageing childless women.

Feminist research also pays great attention to the power dynamic and relationships inherent in research and actively seeks to redress the power imbalance between the researcher and participants (Schultz, 2017). The aim is to produce more relational, collaborative and ethical research (Behar and Gordon, 1995; Khan, 2005; Lather, 2007; Lather and Smithies, 1997; Lincoln, 1997; Schultz, 2017). In the effort to help to bring about this change and create less exploitive research, I have asked myself reflective questions such as: How do I incorporate ageing childless African-Caribbean women's voices and involve them in the research process? How do I represent ageing childless African-Caribbean women in an accurate and authentic way? How can I avoid further oppressing the women in the study?

It is acknowledged that researchers have considerable power in research relationships. Feminist researchers aim to actively involve the participant in the research process as much as possible (Schultz, 2017). However, earlier commentators such as Reinharz and

Davidman (1992) assert that liberty and freedom should not just be seen in the relationship between participant and researcher but it also should be reflected in the research process; for example, deciding where the interview takes place, its duration and how it is recorded.

Early and renowned commentators in the field of Feminist research, such as Oakley (1981), have discussed the benefits and differences that research may make to participants. She argues that research may make participants feel listened to and that their views are important (Oakley, 1981). Participants may also gain a deeper understanding of their own lived experiences, which may help them to make changes in their own lives. Participating in research may also bring about a sense of fulfilment by knowing that the research could be used for a greater purpose (Oakley, 1981). Nevertheless, Chambers (2002) argues that researchers must be careful not to overstate the benefits of taking part in research and the difference it may make. For example, discussing past events may result in feelings of sadness for the participants. Further, research may bring about ethical dilemmas that Feminist researchers are trying to avoid, such as making participants feel exploited and disappointed if the researcher does not bring about the desired outcome expectation (Schultz, 2017) (see Chapter Four, 4.3.1).

### **3.7 Qualitative approach and life course perspectives**

Earlier commentators, such as Gubrium and Sankar (1994), argued that qualitative research reveals the hidden aspects of life by generating knowledge about areas that are often not openly discussed. I argued earlier (Chapter Two, 2.5) that we have little understanding about African-Caribbean women ageing without children from the ‘inside’, as the existing research on the African-Caribbean community in the United Kingdom does not acknowledge those women’s experiences of ageing without children. Thus, a qualitative approach which engages African-Caribbean women and encourages them to tell their life

stories is one way of gaining this insider perspective (Chambers, 2002). As qualitative research is not a single research approach but includes a range of methods and approaches (Silverman, 2005), I considered the varied types of qualitative methods and approaches, including, for example, interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. However, after careful consideration I decided that one-to-one interviews were the most appropriate approach to use as they enabled me to have in-depth one-to-one conversations with the participants that provided detailed personal and biographical accounts (Mack et al., 2005).

A key feature of one-to-one in interviews is their detailed focus on the individual. They provide an opportunity for exploration of each individual's personal perspective, for in-depth understanding. I considered what type of interview structure would be most appropriate to engage participants in discussing and reflecting on their lives. I concluded that a semi-structured interview with a life course focus would appropriately meet my research aims. The life course perspective attempts to understand how individuals and their environments shape and influence each other over the course of their lives (Merrill and West, 2009). Furthermore, the life course perspective values the participants' perspectives and the meaning and interpretation that they place upon their own lives. Therefore it encourages participants to tell their life stories in their own words. This is in line with the interpretative approach I used in this study.

Hutchison (2019: 352) states:

“The LCP looks at how biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors act independently, cumulatively, and interactively to produce great diversity in life course journeys and shape people's lives across family generations. It is a relatively recent attempt to contextualize human behavior, to understand how people and their environments influence each other and change over time.”

Focusing on the life course as a whole provided the opportunity to see how key life events earlier on in the women's lives are linked to what happened in regards to other events in



their lives. For example, Johnson et al. (2011) highlighted how the life course perspective can be used to show how a traumatic experience such as the loss of a parent in childhood can go on to influence the relationships and emotional attachments women form in later life. Moreover, it has also been used to understand not only their individual trajectories but also the pathways of their families (Min et al., 2012). For example, the life course perspective can be used to understand how families develop and form particular patterns of behaviours and attitudes, and how these go on to influence the next generation.

More recently, social gerontologists have begun to use the life course perspective to understand how older adults' lives are shaped by events experienced earlier in life (Seabrook and Avison, 2012). Early commentators, such as Elder's (1994) work on the life course, have been seminal in ageing research. Such work has demonstrated theoretical insights into continuity and change of behaviour from early socialisation into adulthood and then later life. Elder (1998) states that the advantages of using the life course perspective have been evident in the ways in which it explains the numerous social structures that influence ageing. A life course perspective "reveals the interaction between agency and structure in people's lives" (Alheit and Merrill, 2004: 152), connecting the micro and macro levels together across the course of their lives. Mills (1970) refers to this as 'the sociological imagination' linking history, social structures and the individual together. Interrelating these structures helps to understand the time, place and socio-economic and cultural circumstances of a particular event in someone's life.

A life course perspective examines the multiple transitions, milestones and statuses experienced by individuals across their life course (Torres and Young, 2016). Many transitions and milestones relate to family life, including births, marriages, divorces and bereavements. Moody and Sasser (2012:2) state that transitions and milestones "acknowledge ideals around a shared 'social clock', which marks a right and wrong time

for age-graded transitions”. This suggests that there is a right and a wrong time to reach particular milestones and transitions throughout the life course. McGoldrick et al. (2016) also highlight clear distinctions between what are deemed normative life course transitions and milestones and unpredictable transitions and milestones. This is important in this study as the women experienced what would be deemed unpredictable transitions and milestones, such as not having children and/or not getting married. As a combined research method, a semi-structured interview with a life course focus enabled me to understand the women’s life course experiences and how their pathways to ageing without children were influenced by life events and transitions over time.

In order to understand diversity in people’s lives, the life course perspective has begun to acknowledge and incorporate intersectionality theory into its work (see Warner and Brown, 2011). Intersectionality recognises that individuals have multiple and simultaneous identities, such as those based on ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, sexual orientation, age and religion. Each identity group can result in either advantage or disadvantage, which also impacts on one’s social positioning. When examining the life course of individuals it is important to consider how their identity groups impact on their life course experiences, transitions and key life events (see Hankivsky, 2012). This is particularly important for the study of Black women as they tend to live between the intersections of culture, gender, sexuality, class, age and disability and as a result often face oppression based on their identities (Warner, 2008). This impacts on how Black women view the world, and their experiences (hooks, 1984). However, studies on ageing without children have failed to use a life course perspective and consider interlocking forms of oppression. This is a missed opportunity in terms of highlighting the interplay between identities, key life events and the impact of social systems over a lifetime. We also know very little about how systems of oppression such as racism and sexism are interlinked and shape key events across the life course, and jointly constitute later life experiences. Moreover, studies on ageing

without children fail to consider the importance of culture and diversity, and fail to include Black and Ethnic Minority biographical accounts on ageing. Therefore, by looking at the women's lived experiences over their life course and the complex intersections of the women's lives, I offer an invaluable insight and add to the development of life course perspectives.

Overall, as a combined approach, semi-structured interviews with a life course focus were used for three main reasons. First, they are flexible, due to the use of open-ended questions and the research direction being guided by the participants' responses. The researcher does not have to follow a specific order of questioning but can vary the questions based on the natural flow of the conversation (Saunders et al., 2003). Having this level of flexibility was important as it allowed the women to begin the interview at any point in their life course, giving them the opportunity to talk more openly about what was important to them. Second, its use of an interview guide meant that I was able to address specific topics to ensure that the key areas of the study were broached and explored. In my study, the interview guide focused on the individual biography of each participant, including key life events and transitions through a person's life (see Appendix Six). This helped me to understand how key life events and other related factors influenced and determined their contexts and pathways to ageing without children. Third, as this study explored the social, cultural and religious contexts of individuals and how they shaped their life course and pathways to ageing without children, a semi-structured interview with a life course focus helped me to understand the interconnectivity of these contexts and how they impacted on the individuals' lives as they aged.

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter showed that the interpretivist approach was most appropriate to underpin this study as it allowed me to understand the experiences of African-Caribbean women ageing without children. It considered my role and identity as a researcher and how this influenced my understanding of the participants. This chapter also outlined how a Black Feminist Standpoint Theory and Feminist approach shaped how I conducted the research as a whole. It then discussed the use of a semi-structured interview with a life course focus and why this approach was the most appropriate approach to use to gather narrative accounts of the participants' life course experiences. The next chapter, Methods, will discuss what I did and how I undertook this research study.

# Chapter Four: Methods

## 4.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the practicalities of planning, developing and undertaking this research study. I spend time at the beginning of the chapter reflecting upon my own identity, how being an African-Caribbean woman with a background in social work has had a bearing on the approach to the research, including data collection and the analysis. I then discuss how ethical principles are integrated into the research process. Ethical principles underpin the entire research study and guide my own conduct throughout the research process. I discuss the ways in which ethical dilemmas and unanticipated events were addressed and resolved. I then discuss the practicalities of planning, developing and undertaking this research study as well as reflecting on undertaking fieldwork and how I managed the potential challenges and conflicts due to my identity. The second part of the chapter concentrates on the analysis of the narrative accounts and the process of using thematic analysis and identifying key themes that address the research areas.

## 4.2 Managing the impact of my identity

As a woman from an African-Caribbean background, I often took it for granted that the participants and I would have a shared understanding and experiences. For example, when we discussed African-Caribbean culture and upbringing during the interviews, I assumed that we had common experiences regarding how we were parented, our values, celebrations and food. I found this to be more visible in my reactions in the interviews when I would say, for example, *“Yes, we did the same”* or *“We all had those experiences as African-Caribbean people.”*

Based on some of my encounters with both potential participants and the participants that took part in the study, I quickly realised that I could not assume that we had a shared

experience and that all the women would enter into a researcher and research participant relationship easily and completely comfortably because we were from the same cultural background. For example, I experienced some opposition because of some of the questions I asked prospective participants during the early stages of recruitment. This may have been due to our age and generational differences – some questions are off limits and should not be asked by someone from my age group (Etienne, 2014). I realised from the responses the women gave or the wider context of what they were saying that I had very little in common with some of the women. For example, there were generational differences between us. Some participants commented that the issues they referred to about being migrants, or the children of migrants, would not be the same for me. It also became apparent that there were some cultural differences based on islands of origin. Although there were some shared value bases and religious views, there were differences, for example, between national dishes, patois and dialect, and music and also religious beliefs, as some women have abandoned their religious beliefs. I am aware of this through my own upbringing and I was reminded of this when I engaged with the participants, who, for example, spoke a ‘different’ type of patois or ate different types of African-Caribbean food. In such situations, being respectful, open and aware that I did not know about each participant’s cultural norms, lived experiences, attitudes and values was imperative. It was important to inform the women if I had made assumptions about them, although from the women’s responses, I was perhaps at times guilty of being oversensitive as I felt my way through starting fieldwork.

Another dilemma I faced was related to my professional background as a social worker. Being a social worker heightened my desire to want to help and support the participants but also, at times, to resolve some of their problems. For example, I found myself asking the women: “*What action can be taken to challenge the racism or oppression you have experienced in education and health care?*” or “*Have you made a complaint?*” I found

myself 'doing' social work sometimes, trying to find solutions and resolve issues. At times, though, I realised that this was not an appropriate approach.

I was aware that my professional background had caused a potential conflict as my role in this situation was not to help and support these women and the women did not expect this of me. For example, three participants challenged me and one of them said, "*I didn't realise that a part of the interview was to get help as I only wanted to tell you my experiences*" (P6). Such feedback led me to ask reflexive questions about why I was doing this research and had I done the right thing in undertaking the study? At times, I questioned my motivation for the study. On reflection, I realised that my motivation was threefold and comprised personal, professional and academic interests (as discussed in my introduction).

From my experiences, it also became apparent that there was a risk that my insider perspective could have introduced bias by influencing the way I interpreted the women's narratives, which could have led to the misinterpretation of the findings (Jutlla, 2011). I recognised that in order to maximise the integrity of my research study, I had to take a reflexive approach by continually interrogating my assumptions, biases and values as well as my identity, positioning and decisions during the research process. For the purpose of this study I used a reflective diary, an approach which was suggested by Jutlla (2011). Keeping a self-reflective diary was a process that helped to facilitate reflexivity and helped me to examine and be aware of my assumptions, biases, values, belief systems and subjectivities (Ahern, 1999). In using a reflective diary, I identified and outlined my own beliefs and values as well as any assumptions and biases I had in regard to the research and participants. I acknowledged that I had a number of prior assumptions based on my cultural background and religious views. I found that doing 'on the spot' checks with the participants on what I had heard, what I had observed and the stories told by the women during the interviews proved to be an effective way to address some of the issues I faced.

### **4.3 Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval had to be granted before the start of the fieldwork and recruitment of participants. The review by the University of Keele Research Ethics Committee ensured that rigorous ethical considerations and the practical application of ethical principles were undertaken before starting the fieldwork. After some adjustments in response to feedback (initially, the review panel recommended that I made some changes to the documents submitted), ethical approval was granted on 5th February 2016 (see Appendix Two) and I started recruitment immediately. Following significant challenges in recruiting participants, a further application was made to the Ethics Committee in order to broaden the range of participants. I had originally planned to interview African-Caribbean women who migrated. However, as I was, despite very considerable efforts, unable to attract the appropriate number of participants, I also included African-Caribbean women whose parents migrated to the United Kingdom and those who still lived in the Caribbean. I also had to lengthen the fieldwork period slightly to give me more time to recruit more participants as well as amend my research instruments to reflect the type of participants I intended to attract for the study.

In carrying out my own research, I based my ethical approach on the ethical guidelines issued by the British Sociological Association (2002) as well as the principles and values of Feminist and qualitative research, which included, consent, autonomy, confidentiality and justice. With these factors in mind, thinking ethically became an integral approach to the research process which was evident in how I undertook the research and the formal Ethics Committee process.



### **4.3.1 Application of ethical principles**

#### **4.3.1.1 Consent and autonomy**

Giving informed consent was based on the participants' understanding of the information provided to them about the research study (see Appendix Five). Before interviewing the potential participants, I explained about the research project and provided an opportunity for them to ask questions. Written consent was obtained before each interview by asking participants to read, agree and sign two consent forms (Appendix Five), with copies given to each participant and the originals kept for my records.

Giving consent to participate in research should not be a one-off procedure; rather, it must be seen as a process of obtaining and re-gaining the consent of the participants to remain engaged in the research study (Ensign, 2003). Therefore, all participants in my study were reminded regularly that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without giving specific reasons. If a participant decided to withdraw partway through the process, I agreed that I would establish with that individual whether the narrative account they had provided could still be used for the study, or whether it should be completely withdrawn and destroyed. In this study, individuals who had an illness or condition that impacted on their ability to give consent were unable to take part in the research. In order to establish whether there were any issues regarding capacity, I discussed this on an individual basis prior to consent being given to participate in the study. Consent from the participants also included recording and storing their personal data and narrative accounts. With agreement from each participant, I used a digital recorder to audio record the interviews between myself and the participants. I kept the recorded data on a computer, under a password known only to me. I followed ethical principles regarding storing and keeping data safe and secure by adhering to the Data Protection Act (1998).

#### **4.3.1.2 Confidentiality**

During transcriptions, personal details such as first and last names and other information which might have resulted in the identification of the participants were either omitted or changed. I labelled completed transcripts with a number and kept them separate from details of the participants. I had agreed with each participant that anonymised interview material could be discussed in the context of supervision and doctoral teaching days at the University of Keele and subsequently during supervision at the University of Lincoln, and as part of conference presentations or articles. Otherwise, no one had access to the completed transcripts or the interview tapes.

I explained to all participants that their real names and personal details would remain confidential at all times and that their names would be replaced with an agreed pseudonym. However, I found that there were potential challenges to ensuring anonymity in this study. For example, some participants in the study lived in the same community, so even if their names were anonymised, their accounts and circumstances could reveal their identity. Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity also became potentially challenging when discussing participants' jobs and geographical locations. As Peter (2015) states, harm can come to participants if they are identified, including harm pertaining to their reputation, employment and relationships. Therefore, in order to address this issue and in collaboration with each participant, I excluded identifying information, for example, education, employment and service providers, names and addresses. Protection of the participants' identities also applied to the use of quotations. I decided not to use quotations including personal details or information that could reveal a participant's identity. Consent forms included approval by the participants for me to use quotations in the thesis and in any subsequent publications or presentations.

Peter (2015) argues that participants must be informed that the information they provide cannot be kept confidential under all circumstances, for example, due to safeguarding matters. I explained to all participants the circumstances under which confidentiality may be breached. This was discussed on an individual basis before consent was given in writing. I also explained to the participants that if I needed to breach confidentiality in this way I would inform them if appropriate to do so. However, the participants in this study were not vulnerable adults and no safeguarding concerns or any other issues of this nature arose.

#### **4.3.1.3 Minimising risk of harm to participants**

According to Peter (2015), research that examines personal experiences of participants can be highly invasive, particularly psychologically and emotionally. Participants may feel emotionally distressed when they have to discuss a painful circumstance or disclose private information during an interview. However, when interviews are conducted in a sensitive manner and in a skilful way, participants may also report benefits from participation. As this study involved discussing personal and private matters, I anticipated that it could evoke feelings within the participant which could cause them to become distressed. Orb et al. (2001) outline a number of safeguards that should be put in place to minimise the risk of harm to the participants. Thus, in this current study, I took great care to approach interviews with sensitivity and I was alert to potentially upsetting or difficult aspects of the interview. Specifically, I:

- informed participants prior to the interviews that due to the nature of the research topic, they would be invited to talk about areas that were personal to them and which could be potentially sensitive.
- provided sufficient information about the project so that participants were aware of the kinds of topics that would be explored in the interviews.

- ensured that participants understood that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw from the project at any time.
- told participants that they were free to choose not to answer any questions they deemed unsuitable or inappropriate.
- offered breaks to participants if needed.

I also paid careful attention to arranging the interviews in a sensitive manner. Prior to the interviews, I made sure that the participants were involved in choosing the location of their interview and that it was accessible, taking account of the particular requirements the participants had.

#### **4.4 Participants' participation**

The issue of participant involvement in checking and changing narrative data was addressed at the onset. Ensign (2003) argues that if participants have the final say over the interpretation and reporting of the narrative data, it might introduce potential bias; for example, participants may alter the context to make it seem more attractive. There were a number of other issues related to providing participants with their transcripts. First, I considered whether I should show the participants an initial write up of the final transcripts, whether they should be allowed to keep the transcripts, what I would do if they changed their minds about the use of the interviews after reading them and what I would do if the participants disagreed with the content of the transcripts.

I decided that I could not prevent participants from looking at or altering parts of the transcripts as the rights of the participants could be compromised if this was not granted. I therefore decided to discuss and clarify with the participants the extent to which they could change the content, withdraw and provide additional information or add glosses of

interpretation. It was agreed that participants would have a completed and written up transcript (verbatim account) for them to check that they were happy with the content, prior to my own analysis. It was agreed with participants that they could change and remove content that was unclear and/or needed more clarification as well as remove personal and biographical information that could breach anonymity. If there was an error and/or parts of a transcript that they disagreed with, this would be discussed with individual participants and a mutual decision would be reached to address the concern. For the most part, the participants were happy with the content; the majority of participants only changed biographical details. However, two participants were not happy with some of the wording of the interviews and therefore we changed the wording, but the context and meaning stayed the same.

#### **4.5 Location of the study**

I profiled the African-Caribbean community in the United Kingdom and mapped their geographical location, including the three main cities in England where the largest populations of African-Caribbean people resided. I live in Birmingham, which has the second largest population of the Caribbean community in England (Office of National Statistics, 2011); therefore, I had some prior knowledge of the location of some African-Caribbean women who might fit the participant criteria. I focused my recruitment efforts mainly on three cities and their surrounding areas: London, Birmingham and Manchester. However, as I travelled to Jamaica in 2016, I also had an opportunity to discuss my study informally while there and to recruit one participant who was still living in Jamaica. However, she later withdrew from the study and it was agreed that I would not use her narratives in the thesis. Drawing from a wider geographical sample increased the chances of engaging the desired number of participants.

## **4.6 Sample and recruitment methods**

As this was a qualitative study that aimed to gather rich and detailed accounts on the research areas, I was aware that a relatively small sample size would allow for a detailed focus on the research areas and the lives and experiences of the participants. This is particularly important in an under-researched area (Reynolds, 2005). I did not identify a specific number of participants as it was impossible to say how many potential participants would come forward, due to the nature of the research topic.

Initially, the inclusion criteria for the study were migrant African-Caribbean women who were aged 45 and over who did not have children. I aimed to recruit women who, at the time of the interviews, would have been unlikely to be able to conceive children. In order to recruit participants who fitted the inclusion criteria, I focused my efforts on several recruitment methods, which I discuss below. I started recruitment by identifying online local African-Caribbean organisations and community groups. As I live in Birmingham I was also aware of organisations local to where I live. I made contact with the named person at each organisation by email and telephone calls, outlining the research and finding out whether there were women within the organisation who fitted the participant criteria. In these instances, I was advised to formally contact the leaders of the organisations, stating my intentions. Some of these leaders agreed to forward my emails on to organisation members, with the intention for them to contact me directly. I arranged to visit the organisations to discuss my research and offered to give short presentations about the project.

It became evident from the initial recruitment stage that I was not in a position to approach and discuss specific topics with some older African-Caribbean women due to our age and generational differences. By doing so, I could be perceived as disrespectful. As the

gatekeepers were church leaders and people in positions of authority who were well-known and respected in the African-Caribbean community, they were able to confidentially approach some of these women for me. I met four gatekeepers from different organisations who were not asked to select participants for the study; rather, they discussed my study with groups and individuals who attended the settings or they displayed fliers and research information sheets.

As a way to enhance my chances of recruiting more participants, I broadened my search and approached media organisations. I emailed a national Caribbean newspaper, *The Voice*, and they agreed to publish an article about my project (see Appendix Three). As a result of the publicity from *The Voice* newspaper, two radio shows contacted me and asked me to take part in their shows to discuss the study. The shows were broadcast on WM BBC and a BBC Northampton radio show (both shows are geared towards the African and Caribbean communities). When the article was first published and the radio shows were aired, I did not receive any responses for about two and a half months afterwards. At this stage, I also did not receive any responses or contacts from online or face-to-face contacts.

I was experiencing very significant challenges in recruiting participants at this stage and I had to consider what other methods I could use. I used supervision with my doctoral supervisors to discuss my options and to find a way forward. I decided that I needed to broaden the range of participants and lengthen the fieldwork period (see Ethical considerations, 4.3). I felt unhappy that no one came forward to participate in my study and there was a slight feeling of rejection, particularly because I am a part of the African-Caribbean community. However, I realised that as the topic was very sensitive it could take a little longer for people to feel safe to come forward or for people to decide that they did not want any part in research of this kind. It is often assumed that people who are

‘insiders’ will inevitably find it easier to engage research participants (Moffat, 1992).

However, with topics such as this, it simply may not always be the case.

Following the changes to the inclusion criteria, I contacted *The Voice* newspaper again and asked them to republish the article to reflect the changes. In addition, I also displayed posters to advertise the study (see Appendix Four). With permission from the owners, the posters were displayed in local shops, community centres and churches in the Birmingham area. I then contacted both online services and the organisations I initially visited and asked them and the gatekeepers I previously met if they could send out another email and speak to potential participants for me, highlighting the changes in the criteria. These methods were successful in attracting several participants.

Lastly, I also used snowballing as a means to recruit further participants. Once I had already recruited some participants, I used a snowball sampling approach with some participants to establish if they knew anyone who fitted the criteria and would like to participate in the research study (Bryman, 2004). The snowball technique was only used to recruit further participants if the situation seemed appropriate. I did not want participants to feel under pressure to identify other prospective participants, given the potential risks around confidentiality and the sensitive content of the interviews. Also, due to the nature of the research, being sensitive to the individual circumstances and contexts of each participant was important.

In total, I recruited and interviewed ten participants. Six were accessed through advertising my study in *The Voice* newspaper, which is a national Caribbean newspaper. I recruited one participant through contacting organisations online and a further participant by visiting an organisation. I also recruited a further participant using the snowball method and one through a poster advertisement. The ten women recruited to participate in the study were



from an African-Caribbean cultural background (see 2.4.1, Who are African-Caribbean people?) and they had not had children and had never been parents. The pathways to ageing without children can be complex and diverse, encompassing a wide range of states and situations. It was also identified that each unique situation is potentially associated with considerable trauma and loss (Allen and Wiles, 2013). Taking this into consideration, my study engaged African-Caribbean women who have varied experiences and understandings of meaning and pathways to ageing without children. In this study ageing refers to the process of growing older. The women in the study are typically defined as middle aged (see Table 1, Demographic profile of participants) and the study explores their experiences as they age without children.

All participants initially made contact with me by email to inform me that they would like to take part in the research. I responded to each participant's email, provisionally agreeing to interview them. I also had a chance to ask them some basic questions about themselves to find more about them and as a way to determine whether they met the inclusion criteria. I sent them the project information sheet (see Appendix Five) which provided an insight into the study and addressed any questions they may have had. I also took the participants' contact details, including mobile numbers, and agreed to call and/or email them to arrange a time to undertake the interviews.

Table 1 below outlines the profile of each of the participants. The majority of the participants' Caribbean island of origin was Jamaica. This was anticipated as the majority of the Caribbean population in the United Kingdom is of Jamaican origin (Office of National Statistics, 2011). Six of the participants were born in the United Kingdom to parents who migrated from the Caribbean. Four participants were born in the Caribbean, of whom three migrated to the United Kingdom during childhood and one migrated as an adult. The study included women from professional backgrounds; however, their

relationship/marital backgrounds varied. All participants were initially brought up as Christians; however, some participants changed or suspended their religious affiliation when they became adults (see Appendix Seven).

**Table 1: Demographic profile of participants**

Participant	Age	Occupation	Caribbean island of origin	Migration	Current residence	Stated religious affiliation	Relationship status
P1	59	Foster carer recruitment	Jamaica	Born in the UK	Hasting	Christian	Divorced/in a relationship
P2	56	Social worker	Jamaica	Born in the UK	Sandwell	Christian	In a relationship/co-habiting
P3	66	Older persons support worker	Jamaica	Migrated	London	Buddhist	Dating
P4	56	Solicitor	Trinidad and Tobago	Migrated	Hertfordshire	Christian	Married
P5	48	Teacher	Anguilla	Born in the UK	Birmingham	Christian	Single
P6	58	Social worker	Jamaica	Migrated	London	Non-religious	Single
P7	56	University student support services	St Lucia	Born in UK	Bedfordshire	Christian	Divorced/single
P8	64	Therapist/counsellor	Jamaica	Migrated	London	Spiritualist	Dating
P9	54	Social worker	Jamaica	Born in UK	Birmingham	Christian	Single
P10	53	Solicitor	Jamaica/Nevis	Born in the UK	London	Christian	Single

## 4.7 Planning the interviews

I emailed the participants following the initial contact and I went over the information sheet, discussing the study, consent, the implications of taking part and how confidentiality would be kept at all stages of the study. I also gave the participants information about the structure of the interview, including the potential for a break, approximate length of the interview and topics covered. I sent all participants a copy of the project information sheet

(see Appendix Five) and the interview topic guide (see Appendix Six), outlining the broad areas that were likely to be discussed in the interview.

Prior to each interview taking place, we agreed a mutual location, date and time. Six participants wanted to meet in neutral locations with private space such as local community centres, cafés, restaurants or universities. Two women chose to meet in their homes. As a lone researcher, I was mindful of safe working practices. In line with the University of Keele Lone Working Policy, I informed a named person of the location of all interviews and contacted them before and after the interviews. Two of the interviews were conducted over the telephone as this was the participants' preferred option. These interviews were organised in the same way, however; instead of arranging to meet in person at a specific location, we agreed a time for me to call them and blocked out approximately two hours to undertake the phone call.

I asked all participants if they had any particular requirements or needs (for example, accessibility) that I needed to be aware of before we undertook the interviews, to which they said no. I also considered practicalities in terms of travel and whether it was possible to make more than one visit for the interviews. I was able to secure university funding for travel costs and a night in a hotel to travel to interviews that took three or more hours to travel to. As the interviews lasted two and a half hours on average, with the agreement of the participants I conducted each interview in one visit. However, it was agreed that regular breaks would be taken during the interview if required. The interviews were conducted over an eight-month period from March to November 2016.

## **4.8 Undertaking the interviews**

As noted above, I undertook ten interviews. Eight were face to face and two were on the telephone. At the start of each interview, I revisited the information sheet and consent forms, obtaining signed consent forms. I answered any questions about the study and gained permission to audio record the interviews to assist me in transcribing the interviews. I received no objections regarding the use of the audio-recorder or concerning participation in the study. I was worried that the use of an audio-recorder could prevent some participants from speaking openly and freely. However, benefits included both the participants and I being able to focus on having a conversation and allowing me to listen intently and pick up on body language and expressions rather than taking notes and missing what was said. I also needed to audio record the interviews because of the possible density of the interview material, as I could not write as quickly as the participants spoke. In my view, the audio-recorder was often forgotten about as we became immersed in our conversations. When I interviewed the participants in public domains, I ensured that the audio-recorder was placed discreetly next to the participant and we sat in a quiet area where confidentiality could be preserved.

As a social worker, I have experience of interviewing people and found that these social work skills could be transferred to the research interviews. Examples of skills included effective listening and observing social cues as well as working in situations of emotional difficulty. However, I was also aware that the nature of the interaction and interview between me and the service user was significantly different. As a social worker, I would tend to interview people as a part of an assessment of need and risk which would lead to a specific outcome, such as service provision. In the research process, the interview was likely to result in no tangible or specific outcome for participants.

I had a list of topics (see Appendix Six) which I used as a guide throughout the interviews to ensure that the research areas were addressed; however, this was used in a flexible way. There was no order in which to discuss these topic areas, thus I decided on the spot how best to introduce topics and ask specific questions, as suggested by Mason (1996).

In line with semi-structured interviews with a life course focus, the interviews were generally guided by what the participants said. I added or removed specific subject areas in the interview guide from the discussion, depending on how each interview unfolded (Silverman, 2005). Saunders et al. (2003) indicated that the researcher does not have to follow a specific order to the questions; rather, they can vary the order in response to the direction and content of the conversation. As Oakley (1981) noted, in Feminist research, the emphasis should be less on getting questions answered and more on understanding the participants' lived experiences. Therefore, it was really important to have a conversation and avoid presenting a list of questions. In order to achieve this, for example, I asked the participants to tell me about their early childhood experiences, family life, culture and key life transitions. At times, I would add to the conversation if I felt that I related to what was being said or to emphasise the fact that we were having a conversation, mutually exchanging information. Gubrium and Sankar (1994) highlight the importance of interviewing as a vehicle for producing understanding and meaning, where researchers and participants are actively engaged in the co-production of the interview narrative. Therefore, in-depth interviewing is not simply an opportunity for participants to talk about their lives while the researcher listens and remains passive and invisible in the process.

In line with Black Feminist Standpoint Theory, the women should be at the centre of the interview process. The women were encouraged to tell their own stories in their own authentic voices. As discussed earlier (see 3.5, Black Feminist Standpoint Theory), self-definition and self-valuation are key tenets of the theory. This was demonstrated by

encouraging the women in defining how they see themselves and ultimately in defining who they are as African-Caribbean women ageing without children. As Black Feminist Standpoint Theory also recognises multiple voices, avoiding generalisations, it was important to give the women an opportunity to discuss their personal experiences and unique pathways to ageing without children. This involved me as the researcher not taking the lead and or making assumptions about the women's life journeys, but rather letting them guide the interview. Therefore, I spent time throughout the interview asking the women about their lives and who they are. The pace of the interviews was also slow and detailed. I avoided rushing the interviews as I wanted to give the women the time they needed to talk about what was important to them.

The interview was made up predominantly of open-ended questions which allowed the women to talk about their lives. Some closed questions were used to allow me to collect key information from each participant. Legard et al. (2003) state that the advantage of using open questioning in interviews is that it actively encourages the participants to open up and talk in detail, as opposed to giving simple yes or no answers. However, open-ended questioning in interviews can in some instances lead participants off track and into talking about non-related topics, which I was aware of during the interviews. Thus, I planned that if the conversation drifted completely away from the interview areas I could use three types of probes to help refocus the interview, which were amplificatory, explanatory and clarificatory, as suggested by Legard et al. (2003).

Using amplificatory probes according to Legard et al. (2003), involves obtaining a full description and detailed understanding of the experience or matter discussed; for example, I asked the participants to give an example from their personal experience that could expand on and provide more detail about a point previously mentioned. The explanatory probe was used to unpick participants' views and feelings regarding particular events or

experiences; for example, I asked participants “*What did you feel when...*” and/or “*What made you feel that way?*” This brought the conversation back on track and provided details about their thoughts and feelings (Legard et al., 2003). Verbal probes for clarification were used to clarify the key terms participants used; for example, I asked what they meant by using that word (Legard et al., 2003). By doing this, I was able to understand the meaning behind what was said.

Mason (1996) has outlined the multiple tasks involved in undertaking qualitative interviewing, for example, listening, remembering what has been discussed and observing (for example, gestures and body language). I had to be aware of all these aspects during the interview; however, at times I found it difficult to do everything all at once. Specifically, I found some of the environments, such as cafés, coffee bars and university settings, brought distractions and at times hindered the process. For example, waiters asked whether we were ready to order or if we were ready to pay the bill. Also, on one occasion a participant’s cat constantly meowed during the interview and kept wanting to be let in and out of the room. I kept looking at the cat when it was walking in the room and when it was meowing. I also smiled and nodded my head a lot during the distractions to avoid looking annoyed by the constant interruptions. However, I realised that having a fixed smile could lead to the participant feeling uncomfortable and unsure about my presentation (Gillham, 2000). In contrast, a fixed smile may also result in a participant giving a positive answer or response as a smile could suggest a level of agreement. When I referred back to some of the transcripts and audio recording, it was evident that a few ‘golden opportunities’ were missed due to being distracted.

At times during the interviews I felt out of my depth. This was when participants became upset, distressed and tearful, particularly when they were reflecting on previous difficult situations; for example, Participant Four cried when she told me about her father

committing suicide and the impact of this on her childhood. As a social worker I was used to experiencing such situations; however, unlike in these interviews, I would be in a position to help as I would know why the participant was sad. For example, in situations when I was visiting a family to share an outcome of an assessment, I would be aware of what the outcome was and therefore I had an idea whether they would be angry or sad. However, in the interviews, I had no idea what the participants would say and also I was not there to help or resolve their issues. I did, however, find that my social work skills helped me to approach the interviews in a supportive and sensitive manner, helping participants to feel safe. I tried to comfort them in a respectful way by providing tissues and asking them if they were okay. I did not want participants to feel exploited due to sharing their personal experiences. During interviews, there is a danger that participants may share and/or say more than they would normally (Finch, 1984). Therefore, I asked participants if they wanted to end the interview, have a break or change the course of the conversation when they became visibly upset.

Two of the interviews were conducted over the telephone and, on reflection, there were some limitations to conducting them this way. For example, during the interviews with the two participants, they themselves took other calls and put me on hold. This disturbed the flow of the conversation. In addition to this, the women had to take comfort breaks which resulted in them having to end the call. When we restarted the conversation it was difficult at times to pick up exactly where we had left off as the flow of the conversation had been disturbed. This is in contrast to face-to-face interviews where pleasant conversation still took place during breaks, which helped maintain the momentum of the interview.

Moreover, I found that it was more difficult and at times impossible to pick up on social cues and facial expressions during the telephone interviews. For example, upon reflection I realised that at times the two participants would become silent when we discussed sensitive topics but I didn't realise this at the time. Therefore, I could not offer appropriate support



and/or response. However, overall, despite the limitations, when the telephone interviews were replayed using the audio-recorder, I was able to gather sufficient material for them to have been worthwhile interviews. Thus, on balance, the benefit of undertaking the telephone interviews outweighed the limitations.

#### **4.9 Reactions to the interview process**

Overall, the reactions to the interviews appeared to be positive. A number of participants commented that they had enjoyed the opportunity to talk about their lives and topics that they had not discussed for a long time. Participants P4 and P6 commented that it had been something of a release to be able to speak about their childhood circumstances. These were the participants who became upset and tearful during the interviews. It was not possible to know whether the participants who became upset during the interviews remained upset and subsequently felt that the interviews had hurt or harmed them. It therefore became apparent that post-interview contact was important in terms of 'checking in' with the participants to see how they were after the interviews. For the majority of the interviews, it appeared that I was well received.

I found there to be benefits to having a shared identity with the participants during the interview process. For example, for the most part I was easily accepted by the participants and some were happy for me to undertake the interviews in their homes. I could use their amenities such as the bathroom and I was offered refreshments. I also found that as an African-Caribbean woman interviewing other African-Caribbean women, I was familiar with some cultural norms and attitudes that would be considered as common to African-Caribbean women. The participants and I were able to have 'small talk' and also more meaningful conversations about what was happening in the African-Caribbean community and about issues affecting African-Caribbean women. Few et al. (2003: 205) refers to such

conversations as “sister-to-sister talk”, defined as “Afrocentric slang to describe congenial conversation or positive relating in which life lessons might be shared between Black women”. Being able to converse on this level appeared to help the participants to feel more comfortable and receptive towards me and the study. Some participants also stated that they felt more comfortable opening up to another African-Caribbean woman. Most of these conversations happened prior to the recorded interview, although some of the information shared would have been ideal to use in my research. These unplanned conversations blurred the lines between what is and what is not ‘research material’ (Ray, 2001). Thinking and asking reflexive questions helped me to consider whether I had the right to use material from those discussions without gaining consent from the participant first.

I encountered difficulties in using the unrecorded material in practice. For example, as the conversations were not recorded, I had no evidence of what was said and how it was said. I tried to remember the conversations and verbatim accounts; however, this was impossible. As I did not want to misrepresent the accounts, I decided that such conversations could not be included in the transcripts. However, if appropriate, I decided to limit having these types of unrecorded conversations and to discuss them in more detail in the recorded interviews. This was something I discussed with participants; for example, I would ask, *“Can we also discuss the conversation we had earlier during the recorded interview?”*

During these unrecorded conversations, some participants were keen to find out more about me and wanted to know why I had chosen to research the particular topic. Some participants asked me about myself, whether I could not have children and where I worked and my interests. I was reflexive throughout this process, considering what I would do if participants asked me more personal and/or sensitive questions. Although I addressed the general interview process through the information sheet, this did not include the process in terms of participants asking me questions about myself. Therefore, I decided to assess the

situation at each interview and make an informed decision about what I felt was appropriate to answer. Overall, the questions asked were appropriate and I was happy to answer them. As the women were sharing personal and sensitive information about themselves, I felt it was appropriate for them to get to know me a bit better, which may have helped them feel more at ease and not to feel as if they were talking to a complete stranger.

#### **4.10 How the interview process impacted on me as the researcher**

On the whole, the interviews went well and I left them feeling satisfied that the meetings had been positive and I had detailed and rich accounts of the women's life course experiences of ageing without children that addressed the research areas. I enjoyed the interview process and learnt a lot about myself and the women; it was very enriching. There were, however, times when particular conversations led me to reflect on my own situation, lived experiences and cultural identity. At times, the interviews had a profound impact on me. For example, I started to question and challenge the importance and significance of a cultural identity that, at times, I believed put a lot of restrictions on one's life and how one lives it. I also learnt from many of the women's experiences, to prevent myself from going through similar difficulties. I questioned the ethical basis for this and whether it was ethical as the researcher to use the women's accounts to improve my life and situation. I was able to be reflexive and consider the threefold purpose of study, which I discussed in the introduction. I realised that being challenged by the women's experiences and learning from their accounts was necessary for my professional, personal and academic journey, as opposed to causing harm. The women's accounts also challenged some of my ideas and beliefs that I brought to the research about African-Caribbean women. For example, I realised that being African-Caribbean is not central to everyone's identity; rather identity can be multifaceted and can evolve over time.

#### **4.11 Post fieldwork**

Following the interviews, I provided post-interview information which included my contact details if participants had any further questions they wished to ask. I also provided an individually tailored leaflet outlining a range of support services and resources which each participant could access. It might have included, for example, infertility and miscarriage support services, bereavement counselling, adoption support services or stillbirth and neonatal death support groups as well as other various support groups and online resources for women who are childless. I did not design a standard support leaflet as each participant's situation was unique to them. With the agreement of the participants, I arranged to stay in contact with them about the progress of the study. This included giving them the opportunity to read the transcripts and highlight sections within them that may have needed to be altered.

#### **4.12 Transcribing the interviews**

After considering various approaches, I decided to transcribe the audio-recorded interviews myself as I have good listening and typewriting skills. It also provided an opportunity for me to hear the interviews again soon after undertaking them. This helped me actively engage with the interviews and the process of analysis, allowing me to reflect on their content and any key findings. It took approximately twelve hours to transcribe each interview. I initially aimed to transcribe each recorded interview within a week of conducting it but I was unable to achieve this.

The interviews were transcribed by hand orthographically. I recorded all spoken words and sounds such as 'guggles', 'errrs', 'mm-hms' and 'ah-has' as well as laughter, long pauses (indicated by 'pause') and when participants were tearful (indicated by the word 'crying').

To ensure that I portrayed the women's narrative accounts accurately, I transcribed in a way that was reflective of the emotional and contextual aspects of the interview as well as the interview text. I did very little 'cleaning up' of the recorded interviews and used local words, patois (Caribbean dialect) and idioms as they were spoken. I chose to transcribe in this way as it allowed me to provide authentic verbatim accounts of what was shared and how it was shared by the participants. An ethical principle when conducting research is to ensure that it accurately reflects the words and experiences of participants (Berg, 2004; Richards and Morse, 2007). However, there were exceptions to this; for example, if there were parts of the interviews which were unclear and unfathomable this text was omitted, with the mutual agreement of myself and the participant. I also excluded identifiable information, removing any text that compromised anonymity and replacing names with a pseudonym.

#### **4.13 The analysis technique used**

The conceptual framework used for the analysis of my interviews – thematic analysis (TA) – was developed from the work of Braun and Clarke (2006). TA is a qualitative analysis and is used to systematically identify, organise and provide an insight into patterns of meaning (themes) within the narrative accounts. A theme captures the key pattern within narrative accounts in relation to the research question and represents a level of meaning within the narrative accounts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). TA enabled me to explore collective or shared meanings and experiences (Boyatzis, 1998) as well as any differences in the women's narrative accounts. This was important, given the fact that one of the oversights in research is that there are no reported studies that explore the experiences of African-Caribbean women ageing without children and therefore little is known about whether these women have shared or different experiences and why.

There were many potential themes that could have been identified across the narrative accounts (dataset); however, the purpose of TA was to identify those relevant to the research areas. The themes emerged from my interpretation and understanding of the narrative data, which involved assessing how the narrative data addressed the research areas. DeSantis and Ugarriza's (2000) work on themes was particularly helpful to understand the term 'emerging themes'. They outline that themes are created by the researcher rather than passively emerging fully formed from the narrative data. As the researcher, I created the themes that are outlined below.

#### **4.14 The five-phase approach taken to thematic analysis**

##### **4.14.1 Phase 1: Familiarising myself with the data**

This part of the approach involved immersing myself in the narrative accounts, for example by listening to the audio-recordings and reading the transcripts. The aim of this phase was to become intimately familiar with the content of the narrative accounts and to start to notice sections that might be relevant to my research areas. I read all the interviews several times until I felt familiar with the content. I also made notes on individual transcripts and highlighted sections in the text that were of potential interest and where participants had discussed the same topic in similar and different ways.

Throughout this initial phase it was important to not focus solely on the surface meaning of the words, but instead to ask myself what narrative accounts mean. This helped me to think more conceptually about the narrative accounts and to read the accounts more analytically and critically. I asked several questions during this process such as: "*How does the participant make sense of their experiences?*"; "*What kind of world is revealed through the women's accounts?*"; and "*What are my initial thoughts and observations (interpretation) based on the narrative accounts?*"

An example of my initial ideas and thoughts can be seen from P10's interview:

*"I think one factor was studying so initially, it wouldn't have been a good idea to have a child when I was trying to qualify as a solicitor. So that would have been one factor. The second factor was that I was brought up with a strict Christian background that you should be married first. There was that emphasis on finding the right person first after I qualified and getting married before having children. Like I said before, errrm, the fact that I was from a broken home meant that personally I didn't want to have a child outside of wedlock so I was quite careful about that. I also knew that there was a risk as not all women will find the right person at the right time. I knew that there was a risk. Errrm, it was important for me to do it the right way." (P10)*

My initial observations included: (i) P10 had a clear insight into what she thought the key factors were that shaped her pathway/context to ageing without children; (ii) there are identifiable social norms, experiences and beliefs about the order that things should happen and how life should and should not be lived; (iii) she recognises that these social norms and beliefs have their constraints and potentially could come at a price (risk of not meeting the right person at the right time); and (iv) for P10, it is more important to do the 'right' thing.

#### **4.14.2 Phase 2: Generating the initial codes**

Phase two began the systematic analysis of the narrative accounts, through coding. Codes provided a concise summary of a section of the narrative accounts and described the content of the narratives as either a descriptive or latent code. Descriptive codes stayed very close to the participants' meanings, whereas interpretative or latent codes are the researcher's interpretation of the narrative accounts. The codes were a mixture of descriptive and interpretative. For example, some codes reflected participants' language and concepts and others invoked my conceptual and theoretical understanding. For instance, the code 'not giving up; curling up and die' stayed very close to the participants' use of language. In contrast, the code 'resistance against oppressive practices' reflected my

frame of reference. The participants did not use this phrase to describe their experiences; however, I interpreted their accounts through my understanding of what they were saying.

There were different ways to code the narrative accounts; however, after careful consideration I chose to code the narratives manually on a hard copy as it was a small data set with ten participants. I found it easier to manage the narrative accounts this way. Manual coding also allowed me to become more intimate with the data compared to using computer coding software. I also was able to be more thorough and systematic in my approach. As TA is not rigid about how to segment the narrative accounts (for example, I did not have to identify codes on every line of the transcript), I only coded sections that were potentially relevant to the research areas. I referred to them as ‘potential’ because at that initial stage of the analysis, I did not know what might be relevant or not.

I coded on the hard copies of the interview transcripts, clearly identifying the code name next to the portion of text associated with it (see Appendix Eight). I coded in large and small sections; some of the text in the transcripts was not coded at all. All codes were succinct and worked as shorthand; they were not fully worked up explanations as I did that later on. After I generated the initial codes, I read the narrative accounts again until I identified further text that I could code. I assessed whether I already had a code that could be applied to the specific text or whether a new code was needed. I repeated this process throughout all the interviews.

As the coding phase progressed, I altered some of the existing codes to incorporate new text. Some codes were recoded and some had to be completely changed. At this stage of the process, the interviews were fully coded and the data relevant to each code had been collated (see Appendix Eight).



#### **4.14.3 Phase 3: Searching for themes**

In this phase, the analysis progressed from codes to the development of themes. As defined by Braun and Clarke (2006: 82): “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.” As stated earlier, identifying themes was an active process in which I had to construct themes rather than discover them. The basic process of generating themes involved clustering codes together that shared a unifying and similar feature and that also described a coherent and meaningful pattern in the interviews. This phase also involved reviewing the coded narratives to identify areas of similarity and overlap between codes so that they could be clustered together. In this case, I examined the codes and some of them clearly fitted together into a theme. For example, some codes such as ‘loss of a parent’, ‘loss of homeland’ and ‘loss of an unborn child (miscarriage)’ were very similar in meaning, therefore I then constructed the theme ‘Loss’.

During this stage, I also found it useful to have ‘miscellaneous’ themes which included all the codes that did not clearly fit anywhere. Being able to let go of coded material and provisional themes if they did not fit within my overall analysis or address the research areas was an important part of the process. My role as a researcher was to tell a particular story about the data in order to answer the research areas rather than representing everything that was said in the interviews.

#### **4.14.4 Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes**

This phase involved a recursive process where the developing themes were reviewed in relation to the coded narrative and entire dataset. Essentially this involved quality checking and asking myself reflexive questions such as:

- Was this a theme (or could it be a code)?

- What was the quality of this theme (does it tell me something useful and address the research areas)?
- What were the boundaries of this theme (what does it include and exclude)?
- Is there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme (is the theme ‘thin’ or ‘thick’)?
- Is the data too diverse and wide-ranging (does the theme lack coherence)?
- What story do the themes tell me about the women’s experiences and life biography?

The first step was to check the themes against the codes and extracts of narrative data, and explore whether the themes fitted with the narrative data. I discarded some codes and relocated others under another theme. I also merged some themes together into a broader theme. Once this was done I had a distinctive and coherent set of themes that worked in relation to the coded data extracts. I then undertook the second stage in the review process, which was to review the themes in relation to the entire dataset. This involved doing a final re-read of all the interviews. In total there were four final themes (see diagrams 1–3 below). The set of themes captured the most important and relevant elements of the data, and the overall tone of the data, in relation to the research areas.

#### **4.14.5 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes and categories**

In defining the themes, each theme had a clear focus, scope and purpose. The other aspect of this phase was working out what to call each theme. It was important that the names of the themes described the content of the data. There were four distinct themes that I identified throughout the women’s biographical narrative accounts. The three diagrams below highlight the themes, circled in the centre, which are loss, identity, resistance and resilience. It is important to note that the themes resistance and resilience are combined because throughout the interviews they were always linked and were intertwined. For

example, when the women discussed their experiences of resisting oppressive practices they would then link their experiences to the resilience they had developed to overcome such oppression. These themes crossed over the participants' entire life course. Examples of codes relevant to each theme are in the circles pointed to by the arrows.

**Diagram 1: Theme: Loss**



Diagram 1 highlights the theme of loss which is circled in the centre of the diagram. This theme crosses over the participants' entire life course. Examples of the different types of loss experienced are outlined in the codes which are in the circles pointed to by the arrows.

**Diagram 2: Theme: Identity**



Diagram 2 highlights the theme of identity which is circled in the centre of the diagram. This theme considers the participants' cultural and religious identity throughout the participants' entire life course. It also reflects on continuity and the process of change through the life course as there is considerable diversity amongst the participants' current views on cultural and religious identity. Examples of the participants' views and understanding of their identity are outlined in codes which are in the circles pointed to by the arrows.

**Diagram 3: Themes: Resistance and Resilience**



Diagram 3 highlights the themes of resistance and resilience, which are circled in the centre of the diagram. These themes represent the women's varied experiences of racism and mistreatment through the life course and their resistance and resilience in regards to this. These themes cross over the participants' entire life course. Examples of the participants' experiences of resistance and resilience are outlined in codes which are in the circles pointed to by arrows.

#### **4.15 Summary**

Within this chapter, I sought to highlight the key activities involved in the research by discussing the practicalities of planning, developing and undertaking this research study. My reasons for making specific research decisions both before starting the research and once I was ‘in the field’ were also outlined. I also reflected upon my own identity, how being an African-Caribbean woman with a background in social work had a bearing on the approach to the research, including the data collection and the analysis. I then discussed how ethical principles were integrated into the research process and how the ethical dilemmas, difficulties and unanticipated events were resolved. Finally, the chapter discussed the process of using TA and identified key themes that addressed the research areas. The next chapter considers the themes generated from the analysis in more detail and discusses the key findings that work to address the research inquiry.

# Chapter Five: Findings

## 5.1 Overview

I present here the four distinct themes that I identified from the women's narrative accounts. These themes crossed over the participants' entire life course and are also key transitions: loss, identity, resistance and resilience. The chapter is structured to present the findings relevant to each theme. However, sub-themes are used to distinguish between the different types of loss, identity, resistance and resilience that the women experienced over their life course. I have ordered the findings in this way to present the women's recollections (micro) and lived experiences first and to ensure that they are at the centre of the thesis, which is in line with Black Feminist Standpoint Theory.

## 5.2 Theme: Loss

All of the women experienced loss throughout their life course, for example, loss of the Caribbean due to migration, the death of a parent in childhood or loss of an unborn child as the result of miscarriage in adulthood. Some of the experience of loss was specific to the woman's heritage, migration experiences and specific to their subsequent status as women who were ageing without children. In this section, I explore the varied types of loss that the women experienced throughout their life course and how they impacted on their experiences of ageing without children.

### 5.2.1 Loss of the Caribbean due to migration: a continuum of memories about the 'Homeland' from wholly positive to ambivalent

Table 2 below provides brief factual information and details of the migratory process of these participants'. Out of the ten participants, four were born in the Caribbean, migrating to the United Kingdom. Three participants migrated during childhood and one migrated



when she was an adult. The other six participants were born in the United Kingdom to parents who migrated from the Caribbean (see Table 1).

Migration was of great significance and was remembered across the life course. Migration experiences, whether experienced first-hand or via their parents, were a persistent and important biographical thread across the lives of the women in the study. Memories of migratory experiences were often shared with me with a sense of immediacy, which belied the fact that participants were talking about an event that had happened decades ago. The participants referred to in Table 2 (see below) generally paid considerable attention to detail in the telling of their migration stories and often gave important clues about the way in which they wanted them to be understood. They were very expressive when talking about their lives in the Caribbean; they talked with their hands, showing me, for example, that they remembered the breadfruit as being big, expressing how lovely it tasted. They hummed and sang songs that they remembered singing as a child. However, others cried and became very distressed as they recalled some of the painful and life-changing events they experienced through the migration experience. The narratives were complex constructions involving their recollections of their experiences, combined with their parents' memories of the circumstances and context of migration and, also in retrospect, invested with other meanings, feelings, emotions and perceptions experienced.

**Table 2: Migratory information**

Participant	Country of origin	Age of migration	Where they migrated to	Who they migrated with
P3	Jamaica	10	England	Family friend
P4	Trinidad and Tobago	33	England	Alone
P6	Jamaica	7	England	Siblings
P8	Jamaica	7	England	Family friend

There was diversity amongst the participants who migrated. Three of the participants migrated between the ages of 7 and 10 and one participant migrated when she was an adult. Three participants (P3, P4 and P8) vividly remembered their former lives prior to migration. They portrayed their childhoods as being lived out in an idealised homeland where they felt safe and secure, happy and loved. They shared their lives with siblings, friends and extended family members and they expressed how great this time was and how much they missed it. This group of participants experienced intergenerational living, including extended family and the community who ate, told stories and lived life together. They described a life characterised by hot weather, picking fruit from the trees and playing outdoors with their siblings and extended family. They enjoyed climbing trees, going to the rivers and sea and jumping into the water. For example, participant P8 said:

*In the yard we had a massive breadfruit tree and mangos growing. We had a tree-house in the back garden so we were able to stay within the home space. I loved climbing into the tree-house and being in nature. When uncle went to the farm, we took lunch in those stacking canisters and spent time in the fields. People were able to get the produce of the land. When it was breadfruit season we would have a big roast up. People would come get a share out of the bounty. There was a wonderful sense of home, community and family life. (P8)*

Three of the participants (P3, P4 and P8) collectively talked about the sense of security that being in the Caribbean gave them, living in an environment where they felt safe as they

knew their community and family were around them and loved them. The Caribbean gave participants a strong sense of identity and was where they most felt a sense of belonging. Supporting these findings, research has shown how the imagined 'homeland' is often viewed in a nostalgic and idealised way; a place in people's hearts that is kept alive through conversations (Reynolds, 2008). It is suggested that cultural identities are produced and reproduced through the memories and images of one's 'homeland' and beliefs about 'returning home' (Reynolds, 2008).

Despite an initial presentation of an 'ideal' or idealised childhood in the Caribbean, it was also evident that each participant's life, to some extent, was affected by difficult experiences and loss. One of the participants in particular (P6), did not want to talk about her earlier life in Jamaica. She had a reserved approach, not wanting to discuss that part of her life. It was not something she looked back on fondly or often talked about (this came to light when she discussed her migration experience). It appeared that there was a disconnection between her and the country she was born in. P6 acknowledged that she had been born in Jamaica but she seemed to have little connection to the country, never going back to visit or keeping in contact with relatives who still lived there. This may have been a coping mechanism, given the accounts that she later shared regarding migration and the difficulties she experienced. The participant who migrated as an adult (P4) openly shared her experiences. She recounted the happiness of her childhood and growing up with her brothers and sisters, which was juxtaposed with an account of her father's suicide and experiences of domestic violence. Additionally, for P4 migration experiences were very different from other participants as she chose to migrate as an adult, therefore she spent a longer period in the Caribbean. During that time, she went to school and worked, forming relationships and developing a strong Caribbean identity. She explained that Caribbean culture, as a way of life, underpinned her beliefs and values.

### 5.2.1.1 Separation from their parents (left behind in the Caribbean)

Table 3 below gives factual information about the age of the participants when their parents migrated, who looked after the participants when their parents migrated and the period of separation between parents leaving and reunification.

**Table 3: Being left behind in the Caribbean**

Participant	Age when parents migrated	Period of separation from parents (years)	Caring responsibilities taken on by:
P3	4	6	Aunt/grandparents
P6	4	3	Step-grandparents
P8	2	5	Aunt

The three participants listed in the table above remained in the Caribbean with close family members when their parents migrated and they were later reunited with their parents in England. Parents migrated to England from the Caribbean during the British post-war period in search of better life opportunities. The participants were initially left behind in the Caribbean so that their parents could find work and somewhere to live in England. Parent and child separation was not uncommon in Caribbean migration experiences. As Caribbean communities had strong family networks it allowed many parents to migrate and leave children with relatives, friends or neighbours (Arnold, 2006).

There was a lack of understanding about what their parents' long-term plans were and, crucially, what they might expect about a reunion in the future. P3, P6 and P8 did not appear to have been sad or fazed by the lack of information they were given about their parents' migration or the reasons why they had been left behind. As they frequently stayed with their large and extended families, participants felt comfortable living with these family members when their parents migrated. None of the participants recollected questioning why their parents left and if they were planning to return.

*Interviewer: “Did anyone explain how long you would be separated from your mother, where she would be living in England and when you would come to England to join her?”*

*P3: “I knew my mum was missing me and I missed her so I had to come and live with her, I understood that. I did not know where she was living in England at the time and when I would join her or how long we would be separated for. I guess that those finer details were not sorted out straight away but I didn’t mind as I was so young and had a lot of fun things to do and wonderful family around me so I never thought about it.”*

While the participants recalled that they missed their parents, they had heard from their parents regularly via letters and often received gifts, clothes and financial support for the extended family. This was often comforting and was a way to keep in contact with their parents.

#### **5.2.1.2 Experience of loss of homeland when reunited with parents in the United Kingdom**

Analysis from participant (P3, P4, P6 and P8) transcripts highlighted recollections of migration that were suffused with ambivalence. On one hand, it was a time of excitement and anticipation to be reunited with their family, but, on the other hand, participants also reflected on their memories of the process being fraught with many challenges, specifically how they should start to try and fit in with their ‘new’ family and the challenge of settling in and adjusting.

Migration involved re-establishing relationships with a parent whom they had not seen for several years and with whom they had conducted a relationship at a distance and predominantly via letters. Second, they were often required to make a new relationship with an unknown step-parent or with siblings who were born in England and who they had never met. There was a binary experience in terms of their happiness as children in the Caribbean and the sadness they felt when they left their homes and extended family and

friends to join their families in England, as seen in P3's and P8's accounts. Again, the analysis highlights the ambivalence between on the one hand recognising the importance of being reunited with one's parents and on the other the deep sadness associated with leaving behind their homes and extended family. The three participants (P3, P6 and P8) who migrated to the United Kingdom as children collectively had similar experiences in terms of adjusting to aspects of the new environment they lived in. They all discussed the loss of a benign climate, cold winter nights, feeling frozen and sitting in front of a paraffin heater:

*"It was cold. It was freezing. I hated it. I really hated it. I went on a hunger strike as I wanted mum to send me back. I really missed it and I was trying to control her to send me back."*(P3)

Collectively, they struggled with the enormity of the changes they had to face in regard to cultural differences such as the lack of Caribbean food and the difference in day-to-day life such as language, the way communities were organised and operated such as the education system. The enormity of the changes led to P3 refusing to eat, to persuade her mother to send her back home. P4, who migrated as an adult and of her own volition to improve her opportunities via education, also still expressed sadness and loss in leaving a country that had been her home for the whole of her life. Not knowing anyone in England added to feelings of isolation and loneliness when she arrived. In her bid to improve her situation, she relocated several times over a short period of time to secure work and this, she felt, inevitably impacted on her sense of stability. She reflected that she often felt alone and lost, following the magnitude of the change and the challenge of finding a settled place in England and starting to build a life. She experienced a deterioration in her mental health and wellbeing six months after migrating due to her isolation and dislocation.

The participants who migrated as children (P3, P6 and P8) had to rebuild relationships with their mothers after lengthy separations. For two of the participants (P6 and P8), this was

problematic, creating a number of long-term difficulties. Conversely, P3 shared a different account of her migration experiences. However, despite her indicating a positive experience, it emerged that she did not live with her mother when she first migrated to England but with her aunt, spending time regularly visiting her mother and siblings. Her reason for this was that her aunt's daughter had moved away and her aunt needed someone to care for her.

Participants P6 and P8 felt disconnected from their respective mothers and they felt that they no longer knew them, nor could any of them remember how to relate to each other. The participants felt lost and confused as their mothers were unable to or unwilling to show them emotional warmth and love. They did not understand why the bond with their mothers was so fractured and awkward and, of course, they missed the easy-going and loving relationships from home. They felt excluded by their wider families and experienced uncertainty about their identities and place in the family. Their feelings were compounded by seeing their siblings who were born in England being treated as better than them and receiving preferential treatment.

Participants P6 and P8 consistently reflected on their expressed longing to feel loved by their mothers and to have the same relationship that their British born siblings had with their parents. The findings suggested that both participants felt unwanted by their mothers and families. This brought with it a sense of abandonment and rejection and compounded loss. The reunion with their mothers highlighted the implications of being left in the Caribbean which led to them resenting their mothers for leaving them and for also having other children that they appeared to have bonded with. While they may not have directly blamed their siblings, they both felt that relationships with their siblings were very strained because of the jealousy they felt and the feelings they had of being outsiders that characterised their own lives. The strained relationships with their siblings made the

situation worse. They also felt isolated and alone at home and often the same at school and in their neighbourhoods/communities. The findings highlight that talking about these events had a sense of the present which belied the fact that they happened many years ago – indicating long-term loss which remains unresolved, highlighting the sense of ‘unfinished business’.

Based on the analysis of the transcripts, several factors contributed to the challenges the women (P6 and P8) experienced. Firstly, the length of separation – which amounted to several years – was a factor. Secondly, migrated parents had expectations of their Caribbean-born children. There was also an expectation that the mother and child would be able to re-establish their relationship with ease, and as a child born in the Caribbean they had to set the standard in terms of displaying outstanding behaviour, helping around the house and caring for their siblings. From their accounts, these participants were very confused as there was no conversation between them and their parents about these expectations and their roles once they came to England. Furthermore, there was a dissonance between the two situations, as there were no expectations of them fulfilling such roles when they lived in the Caribbean:

*“When I came, my mum was insisting I should help around the house. My childhood ended in Jamaica. Now, all of a sudden I was told that you are the eldest and you need to set an example. And because you are the eldest girl and Caribbean you are expected to support your mother in running the home and looking after the children. Ummmmm, as I felt more lost, I more or less disappeared into myself and my little world. Me and the bubbles at the sink was my little world. It was my free little space.” (P8)*

Not being able to meet these expectations put an additional strain on their already difficult relationships with their mothers. Participants P6 and P8 recollected being told that they were ungrateful for all that had been done for them by bringing them to England and looking after them.



As their whole families were in a period of immense adjustment, P6 and P8 explained that their home environments were often tense. Their mothers were still adjusting to life in England and were facing a lot of challenges, such as inadequate housing, poor employment and experiences of racism. The participants felt that their mothers' feelings were exacerbated when their children appeared to be unhappy/ungrateful. In the accounts shared by P6 and P8, their mothers were described by both as not being emotional or affectionate people. Their mothers were also shaped by their own experiences of parenting which impacted on their ability to bond with their daughters. Both participants recognised that they were not given the emotional warmth and love that they desired and at times they experienced both emotional and physical abuse from their mothers.

Participants P6 and P8 in this situation blamed themselves as children for some of these experiences they faced as they struggled to come to terms with what had happened. As a result of their childhood experiences, both participants who migrated as children questioned their identities, who they were and where they belonged. Leaving home at the earliest opportunity allowed them to get away from the difficulties they had experienced living with their parents. However, despite moving away from their parental homes, both participants were still significantly affected by their earlier life experiences. Both P6's and P8's feelings of low self-worth and abandonment affected the relationships in adulthood. They were unable to love and trust anyone due to the fear of being rejected, as they had been earlier on in their lives. However, P8's experiences specifically played a role in her not wanting to have children. On two occasions she became pregnant (unplanned) and subsequently had two miscarriages, which were a relief as she did not feel able to parent a child. P6 had initial plans to have children when she was younger; however, she was unable to establish relationships due to her earlier experiences with her mother and then had a diagnosis of fibroids with further complications which led to her having a hysterectomy. Both participants deemed it necessary to have therapy and counselling as a

result of their earlier experiences. This helped to resolve some of their previous experiences and release their feelings of anger and resentment. Accessing counselling and therapeutic services was crucial and necessary in terms of repairing, rebuilding and healing from some of their earlier experiences and the relationships with parents.

#### **5.2.1.3 Loss (death) of a parent in childhood**

Deceased parents included two fathers who died suddenly (committing suicide) when their daughters, P1 and P4, were children. Linked to these experiences of loss and separation, the findings outlined several common themes which included emotional distress, despair, relief, disruption and continuity.

Both participants talked about the loss of their fathers and reflected on their lives before their fathers died, the circumstances leading up to their deaths and life after their fathers' suicides. Participants P1 and P4 spoke about a sense of relief in being able to revisit these experiences which they rarely spoke about. Their fathers' deaths were very sudden, something that they did not anticipate and have a chance to prepare for. When they shared their accounts, there was a sense of 'unfinished business' as they had never had a chance to resolve some of these earlier experiences. It was evident that before they died, both fathers experienced difficulties which the participants felt influenced their decisions to commit suicide. For example, P4 described the years before her father's death in the Caribbean as being very traumatic due to his violence and alcohol misuse. She recalled hearing her parents fighting and seeing blood in her home and also the implications of his substance misuse, such as unstable housing and debt. She described experiencing emotional abuse as a result of domestic violence in her household.

The analysis highlighted what P4's life was like after her father's death and how she coped during that time. One of the ways she coped with the loss of her father was through the

stability offered by attending school and the relationships with her remaining family, teachers and peers. School, in particular, provided an outlet and was a way for her to escape (albeit temporarily) the enormity of such profound loss and disruption. The stability of attending school was important as it helped to provide continuity and normality during those difficult and unstable times. The two participants' social networks stayed the same, although some changes took place after their fathers had died. Another very significant change in family relationships was that their mothers became single parents. This meant that they were not always present in the family homes: *"She was so busy making a home for us and looking after us she didn't have time to say I love you. She just worked so many jobs."* (P4)

Changes in parental capacity were found to be distressing for the participants as children. This was linked to the fact that the surviving parents had to assume the roles and responsibilities of the fathers, thus they were not able to offer the love and emotional warmth they once offered. P4's mother also had to recover from experiencing domestic violence and the anxieties associated with living in that kind of situation. A shared experience that both women (P1 and P4) discussed was how the loss of their fathers changed their family dynamics and the roles of their mothers.

Seeing the day-to-day struggles of their mothers as single parents who were having to fulfil both roles, as well as experiencing the loss of their fathers, also influenced the two participants' (P4 and P1) views on relationships and marriage. P1, for example, married someone whom she says she knew was unsuitable and the marriage ended after a year. She explained that throughout her life course she continued to meet men whom she believed were like her father. This was one of the reasons why she did not go on to have children, as she explained that the relationships were not loving and stable enough for her to have children. She desired to have a child in a marriage that was loving and secure. Throughout

her life, she was able to reflect on the situations and consider how they may have linked to her earlier experiences with her father. Despite not being able to have a child now, she did not seem to have any regrets; rather, she had reconciled her life choices, decisions and circumstances that led to her to not having children. However, P4 was adamant that she would not be a single parent due to the difficulties she and her mother and siblings had experienced and she took steps to ensure that she married a man of ‘good’ standing whom she believed would not repeat what her father had done.

#### **5.2.1.4 Loss of a spouse through divorce**

Two participants, P1 and P7, were divorced. As outlined in the section above, P1 believed that her relationship with her father and his subsequent death played a role in her not being able to establish secure, loving and lasting relationships. P1 was divorced from her husband a year after she had got married. P7 was married for several years; however, she believed that she had met the “*wrong man*”. Despite having strong religious views on marriage and family life, P7 had no choice but to get a divorce. The divorce resulted in feelings of guilt and shame and she felt that she had failed.

Participants P1 and P7 had always wanted to get married and were very adamant that they wanted to be mothers and they planned to have children in their marriages. P7’s diagnosis of fibroids during her marriage prevented her from getting pregnant. She had a sense of relief that she did not get pregnant during the marriage due to the difficulties she experienced which led to her divorce. She described not getting pregnant as a “*saving grace*”:

*“But I don’t know but I felt at the time that if I had a child and fell pregnant then it was within a marriage but then if I did have children with that person it would have been the worst thing to have happened if I did, not a good situation at all. I found out that I had fibroids but I didn’t know that at the time. I don’t know if it was faith but God protected me as it would have been bad to have children with that individual in that marriage so I think that was a saving grace.” (P7)*

Similarly, P1 experienced a sense of relief when she miscarried while married. Her relationship was unstable and she felt that a child would put further strain on the marriage. Both participants held the view that children should only be conceived within marriage. Neither participant met anyone whom they felt able to marry after their divorce and while they were of childbearing age, therefore they did not go on to have children. At 59 years old, P1 was in a stable relationship and she commented that, paradoxically, this relationship would have been ideal within which to have children.

#### **5.2.1.5 Loss of reproductive potential**

Five of the participants lived with diagnoses of fibroids, which impacted on their fertility and ability to have children. These participants were diagnosed with fibroids in their late thirties and early forties and had not realised until then that their fertility may have been compromised. They experienced abdominal pains and symptoms of fibroids; however, they had delayed diagnoses which they believe was the result of mistreatment and racism by the health care service. From the accounts given, the participants' experiences reflected an initial lack of awareness of the condition and symptoms, which were painful and troublesome, and a slow response from medical practitioners, including diagnosis. The treatment they were offered was inadequate and not responsive to their needs. As a result, they had further health complications which prevented many of the participants from having children later on in their lives.

Information and varied treatment options regarding fibroids were not always readily available and accessible to the five participants. They became more aware of the implications of fibroids after they started to ask questions and search for information outside of the health service. During their own research into fibroids, three of the women found out that African-Caribbean women tended to have increased incidences and to have

multiple fibroids that were more aggressive than in other groups of women. Therefore, it would have been beneficial for them to have had early diagnoses and treatment when the condition was in its relatively early or mid-stage as opposed to presenting late when the fibroids were difficult to treat. Once diagnosed, they were offered invasive and unsuitable treatments. Participants P2 and P6 were encouraged to have hysterectomies which would have prevented them from conceiving. From the perspectives of the five participants, the lack of culturally competent practice and racist and sexist assumptions appeared to play a significant role in their experiences. There was an overall lack of knowledge about the greater prevalence of fibroids amongst African-Caribbean women and the potential implications. Participants also reported that there was a significant difference in how they were treated when compared to women from White backgrounds. For example, P6 stated:

*“Errrr, I remember when I had my womb removed. I was in room by myself for a couple of days and then they said I can go on the ward as they needed the room for someone else. When I was in the ward I was put next to a White woman and she said she came in for an operation for fibroids but she looked happy. I didn’t ask her if everything had gone okay. I could see she looked happy. But I didn’t ask her. I was feeling so crap I just listened to her telling me she was okay and they removed the fibroids. At the time I thought about the doctors, if they didn’t need to do it they wouldn’t have done it. But sometimes I wonder, particularly when I hear about so many Black women having their womb removed due to fibroids.” (P6)*

P6 did not feel confident and able to challenge the medical staff’s decision to remove her womb. She assumed that the doctors would not have undertaken the procedure to remove her womb if they did not have to. She also assumed that this was the only treatment available, as the health professionals did not provide alternative options.

The five women here have described what they thought was institutional racism in light of their experiences. Racism has been a theme throughout the women’s biographies. The women shared how they had developed resilience and agency to combat earlier experiences of racism through their life course, such as in education and employment (see 5.4.1). However, three of the women expressed that their resilience lessened in difficult

situations where they felt powerless and vulnerable. This highlights how vulnerable some of the women can be in personal and difficult situations regardless of their previous levels of resilience. For example, P2 shared:

*“When I went to see the doctor one thing the doctor said is, look at you, look at your age. Why do you want children at your age and not being married? I said I haven’t had children and want to have them. She said at your age and your situation it’s best to have a hysterectomy. How can that be the only option? I have English friends who had fibroids and took medication. I felt so worthless and powerless. I didn’t have the confidence and strength to fight.”*  
(P2)

The impact of fibroids and her experiences with the health care setting had quite a profound impact on P2. The accounts showed that fibroids did not only impact on her fertility but also on her emotional wellbeing, and she had feelings of regret and of being helpless about her circumstances. Four of the women in particular identified a number of knock-on effects of their diagnosis of fibroids and the subsequent treatment. Specifically, they reported multiple losses; the diagnosis created a barrier to how the women pursued relationships. Having fibroids led to these women experiencing depression and low mood, and to feeling powerless and inadequate as well as losing interest in socialising and previous life goals of being in a relationship. For example, P10 wanted to have children; however, finding out that she had fibroids stopped her from meeting people and lessened her chances of having children because of the effects of the fibroids. She recalled having a sense of loss due to this.

The treatment decisions the women made were influenced by the options available, which tended to be very limited. For example, none of the women accessed fertility treatment such as IVF (in vitro fertilisation). Three of the women talked about IVF and shared that it was not something they could access at that time in their lives due to cost and lack of availability on the NHS, whereas two of the women had an operation to remove the fibroids. They expressed that due to the pain and discomfort they experienced, they asked

to have an operation to remove the fibroids. Although their requests were initially denied several times, they were eventually agreed. However, by the time one of the women had the operation there were further complications that impacted on her being able to conceive. Two other participants chose not to have their fibroids removed, but for different reasons. P2, for example, did not have a hysterectomy and/or her fibroids removed as she could not accept this was her only option. In contrast, P3 chose to accept her condition and considered it as her fate. All but one of the participants were unable able to conceive after having fibroids and the subsequent experiences they faced. This was devastating for a number of the participants as they had always longed to have children.

#### **5.2.1.6 Loss of an unborn baby as a result of miscarriage**

Three of the participants experienced one or more miscarriages. Participants reflected different contexts, experiences and reactions to miscarriage, ranging along a continuum of relief, excitement and despair. In terms of relief, P1, for example, highlighted the challenge of having a baby in an unhappy marriage. Her relationship was very unstable and she believed that bringing a child into the marriage would have put more strain on an already difficult relationship. After she had a miscarriage her marriage ended, which proved to have an overall positive outcome for her:

*“I felt free. For me, not having a child in that marriage was positive. I would have been focused on raising that child on my own which could have been difficult and managing the relationship between the child and that father and the father’s family could have been complicated. For me life was quite simple, I could just walk away from that marriage and meet someone new as if it didn’t happen.” (P1)*

In contrast, P8’s experiences were akin to despair. Her earlier migration experiences had resulted in her feeling rejected and abandoned. This led to her not feeling able to care for children and also not wanting children due to the fears that she was never good enough. Her despair turned into her experiencing suicidal feelings and depression during pregnancy as she had never planned to have children. Having a miscarriage also gave her a sense of



relief. However, P9's situation reflected feelings of both excitement and disenfranchised grief. She had longed to have a child and saw being a mother as an integral element in her life plan; miscarriage was experienced as a devastating event. Her emotional reactions in the interview highlighted the sense of immediacy that still surrounded the event. For example, after having a miscarriage she blamed herself for not being able to be a 'real woman' in comparison to others, and she had a perception that she was a failure. The feelings of failure were also linked to getting pregnant before she was married. As a practising Christian, she held strong religious views about marriage being the only circumstance in which to have children. As a result, she experienced feelings of shame and guilt and was constantly worried about how she would be perceived and treated by her parents and the wider community. However, prior to having a miscarriage, she had decided to go ahead with the pregnancy despite not being in a stable relationship or marriage.

Participant P9 felt connected to her unborn baby, which she described as having maternal instincts to love, look after and protect her baby. Being pregnant brought into question the meaning of childlessness and motherhood for P9:

*"When I was pregnant, I did think about re-mortgaging the house and borrowing enough money to pay for the childcare fees. I was preparing for the baby and felt so connected to my baby. My maternal instincts were very strong and I felt like a mother."* (P9)

The concept of childlessness would imply that the person in question has not had or conceived a child of their own. However, from the analysis, it is clearly far more complex than this. Although P9 had experienced a miscarriage and therefore may not be considered as being a mother in the traditional sense, she considered her experiences of pregnancy as meaningful and that she had had a maternal bond and experience which included emotional connection and preparation for the arrival of her baby.

### **5.3 Theme: Identity**

This section explores the women's cultural and religious identity and beliefs throughout their life course, considering how they were formed and how they influenced their views of marriage, children, family and caring for relatives and children. This section also reflects on continuity and the process of change through the life course, as there is considerable diversity amongst the participants' current views on cultural and religious identity.

#### **5.3.1 Cultural and religious identity**

The analysis highlighted two themes that emerged during the conversations with the women about growing up in an African-Caribbean home. One theme focused on everyday cultural norms such as food, language and parenting styles, while the other theme focused on cultural and religious practices and traditions around family life and views on marriage and children. Participant transcripts highlighted that there was no distinction in regard to upbringing between the women who were born in the Caribbean and the women who were born in the United Kingdom. In both locations, parents and carers sought to preserve African-Caribbean culture and traditions. The findings showed that this provided a means to preserve cultural identity as well as to convey their beliefs to their children and give them a sense of who they were and from where they originated. There were key similarities expressed by all of the participants as culture and religion involved a core set of beliefs and practices that shaped their earlier life experiences and views around family life and marriage.

Cultural norms included listening to Caribbean music, food and family gatherings. There were different takes on African-Caribbean food which reflected their African-Caribbean heritage and the specific Caribbean islands that they were from. For example, women from

Jamaica (see Table 1) who had Jamaican parents talked about listening to Reggae, whereas women from smaller Caribbean islands listened to Soca and Calypso:

*“In our household, mum liked to socialise a lot. We had a front room. My dad had his blue spot radiogram. I think that’s what it’s called. He used to play for the parties we had at home. It had a drink cabinet next to it with everything in it. He loved his Reggae music and you could hear him playing music way down the road [laugh].” (P9)*

Similarly, discussions about African-Caribbean food also brought about the same sense of happiness and joy. They also reflected continuity, preserving African-Caribbean customs and bringing family together. As described by all of the women in this study, family life highlighted the centrality of the African-Caribbean community and life. Nine of the participants came from large nuclear families themselves and saw their parents and their siblings getting married and having children. This reinforced the importance of family life and of marriage as a normative expectation in adulthood and an essential status before having children.

Family was also important as it provided vital sources of support to African-Caribbean migrants. All the women explained how in England their wider families often visited each other’s houses, looked after each other’s children and spent time socialising together. This signified and reinforced a strong sense of community, bonding and cohesion. This is a key feature of migrant communities; it is a way to help new communities to settle in, grow and thrive in a new environment.

All the women were raised to have strong beliefs about traditional gender roles and a dominant pronatalist orientation, which were reinforced by both cultural traditions and religious beliefs. This was evidenced by their view that there was an expectation to get married and to have children. Motherhood was understood as a woman's basic mission and profession, and an innate quality, and the participants often accepted this as a norm.

Therefore, examples of childless African-Caribbean women were rare, though three participants noted that they had aunts who were childless. To prevent potential discrimination or judgement they immersed themselves in rearing other people's children and taking on the role of a mother. Therefore, these women were not perceived as childless. The images of their aunts shaped the three participants' views about childlessness and their overall outlook. The image they had of childless women was a positive one where these women were held in high esteem and remained actively involved in children's lives. For example, P8 explained:

*“Actually my aunt was childless; however, I wouldn't have considered her as childless except realising it in my adulthood, as she took in family members such as myself and also took in other people's children and looked after us. I grew up in a household with other children. My aunt was very much part of community life; a great role model.” (P8)*

The expectation to have a family, children and a husband was often a subtle expectation but in some instances it was explicit. For example, five participants were directly told when growing up that they should only have children within marriage and if they did not have children they would be considered as abnormal. These views often made the women quite frightened to have intimate and sexual relationships outside of marriage. Earlier experiences impacted on the women's willingness and confidence to engage in relationships as young adults. Five of the women felt unprepared to have relationships in adulthood due to these earlier experiences.

The churches that all of the participants attended throughout their early childhoods reinforced these teachings and placed a strong emphasis on obedience to parents and having a traditional family life. The participants explained how important it was to listen to, respect and adhere to their parents' views.

*“Mum used to say whatever you do don't bring a baby, no baby into this house. That was in my mind, because mum said don't have children until you get married. I was on the pill for a long time. I should have come off the pill and tried to have a baby and not wait until I was forty.” (P2)*

There were external pressures from the church and wider family to adhere to practices and norms throughout their life course. Three of the participants recalled being told by family and church members that if they went to church, followed the Christian religion and did everything right, they would be ‘blessed’ (seen as of high stature and highly favoured by God) with a husband and children. Not conforming to these expectations would lead to the women being seen as deviant and undesirable and their religious and social status would be impacted on.

The analysis has revealed that seven participants were stigmatised and assigned negative attributes due to being childless and they received harsher treatment than childless men in their community. Their experiences involved name calling and being openly ridiculed as well as being isolated and treated less well than women with children. Seven of the women faced these experiences throughout their adult lives; it appeared to steadily increase when they reached their thirties. This is in line with general trends, as there is an expectation that women should be having children at this point in their lives:

*“It’s like you’re not normal. I have had that several times over and over [crying]. Someone said you don’t like children as you haven’t got any. That’s what people generally think or that I must be a lesbian.” (P6)*

All of the participants shared that they faced relentless questioning by members of the African-Caribbean community about their childbearing plans. All of the women found it difficult to keep their childless status private. The analysis showed that six participants often felt quite anxious and fearful about telling people in their community about their childless status due to the risk of negative responses and judgement. They often regretted divulging their status to people. As P2 explained:

*“If they ask me then I would tell them. Immediately, I regret telling them I haven’t got children. I say I can’t have children. They say it’s a shame and I say why is it a shame? If you can’t have children you can’t have them. So you think in a way not only have you got people saying it’s a shame that you*

*haven't got children and people making sarcastic comments that you haven't got children, but they try to make me feel less than what I am."* (P2)

Collectively, these women shared that they have had periods of anxiety and depression due to the fear of how people would perceive them. The competing pressures of societal expectations and seeing other women in the African-Caribbean community with children often made some of these women feel under extreme pressure too. Seven of the participants often felt that they had let their families and communities down by not having children, which often resulted in feelings of emotional distress and self-blame. These feelings added to the women believing that they were failures.

Despite these negative experiences, the analysis of the women's interviews showed that half of the women continued to adhere to these cultural and religious beliefs as older adults. Their experiences of going to church and being raised as Christians formed the basis for their identities as adults and they continued to adhere to traditional practices. The analysis revealed that their socialisation in relation to their beliefs and practices often made it difficult for the women to ignore them and let go.

Culture and religious beliefs also guided these five participants in terms of what types of men they could marry. In terms of suitability, any man they intended to marry had to be a Christian man who was well educated. Crucially, a prospective husband had to share their religious conviction and faith. The interviews showed that these participants were unwilling to marry and have children with just anyone. Four of the participants in my study were identified as single (see Table 1: Demographic profile of participants). One of the reasons why they were single was because they did not find the right man.

From the accounts it was clear that changing and shifting cultural identities amongst some African-Caribbean people, particularly in regard to gender roles and family structure,

meant that there were not always available husbands who shared their religious conviction and faith. As a result, four of the women who followed traditional religious and cultural beliefs did not get married and therefore were unable to consider having children:

*“It’s very rare to find someone who is Black and upholds Christian beliefs and traditional ways of living. They don’t want to get married anymore. It’s difficult to find someone of my level and because of that I have struggled to meet someone.” (P7)*

There were cultural and religious restrictions on how women pursued relationships, as well as strict views in the church about what was appropriate female behaviour. It would be seen as unorthodox as a practising Christian to pursue men romantically. Typically, women would wait for a man to approach them and ask them ‘out’. This would limit their options as they could not choose a man they wanted as they had to wait. This often meant that women had to delay their childbearing plans if the right man did not approach them.

Participant P4 described her experiences:

*“We got married late as I was waiting for the right man to come along and then he did and asked me to marry him. We were both Christian so we waited until marriage. I said we are not going to do birth control so what happens, happens. After a year nothing happened so I went to the doctor’s to see what was going on. So when I went to the doctor. So what happened to me was at 41 years old the doctor said you are okay but you are menopausal.” (P4)*

P4 described her lifelong ambition was to be a mother. When she realised she was unable to have children her husband was understanding and supportive. He himself had a medical condition that may have impacted on his fertility; therefore he had already come to terms with the fact that he may not have been able to have children prior to meeting her. While these women waited for the right man to come along, they studied and worked, often developing their careers along the way. From five women’s accounts it was clear that rather than openly choosing childlessness, they made choices about focusing on educational attainment and careers while waiting for the right man to come along to marry.

Although the five women were clear in their beliefs and how they chose to live life, there was a sense that this was not always easy to adhere to and abide by, given the changes around them. It was evident that they were very well aware of the risks associated with waiting, as there was always a risk that marriage would not happen and children would, therefore, not arrive. Throughout their lives, the women were also challenged by the changes in their social contexts and also the environments that they were exposed to. For example, they went to university and worked in various organisations where people had different views to them. They also had family and friends who became more liberal throughout their lives. Some of these experiences challenged some of the women's beliefs and identities and led to some in this group considering a change in their long-established values and practices. Observing other women settling into marriage and families heightened the challenge. For example, P9 started a relationship with a non-Christian man, having never been in a relationship before. This led to her having a sexual relationship outside of marriage which resulted in her getting pregnant. She subsequently experienced a miscarriage.

These five participants typically assumed responsibility for the choices they made and beliefs they adhered to. They never blamed their earlier socialisation and/or the way they were raised; however, they did accept that their views were influenced by cultural norms and the people around them. The other half of the women in the study chose to adhere to the traditions and beliefs that were important to them, while letting go of ones that were not, thus mixing some of the traditional values with a variety of ones that appealed to them. These participants had also moved away from their families and preserved few, if any, African-Caribbean ties. Therefore, cultural pressure to adhere to cultural and religious norms rigidly was absent. These women were more inclined to socialise with a variety of people and in varied settings. Their traditional beliefs and norms were challenged by people they met throughout their lives and the new ideas presented at university and/or at



work. They were more likely to choose their own lifestyles, and ideas such as autonomy, choice and agency were very important to them. Three participants did not define themselves as Christian due to not seeing the value in some beliefs and traditions, as they were not in line with how they saw life and how they lived now as adults.

Identity construction and changing and letting go of beliefs from childhood was a process that took place gradually, over time. One of the women (P5) realised as a young adult that she did not want to live up to some of the cultural expectations, such as getting married and having children. She never intended to have children. As a young adult she felt that it was not possible to challenge these cultural norms as it could create tension with her parents and wider family. However, when she became older she was able to resist the pressures of her family and cultural expectations by moving away and by rejecting some of these expectations. Despite initial resistance from her parents and wider family, they learnt to accept her decision not to have children:

*“When I made a decision in my twenties not to have children, I knew I couldn’t tell anyone as it would be frowned upon and it would not be accepted. My parents would be very unhappy with me as it’s not something Caribbean women say often. It was not my intention to have children anyway as I like my freedom. I never had that craving feeling to have a child like one of my sisters who did and went out and got one at 21 [laugh]. I didn’t want that responsibility. But as I got older and moved away, I was able to be me and was free from these expectations. People started to accept me for who I was. Well, it took a while but eventually the questioning and harsh words stopped.”*  
(P5)

From the analysis, it is evident that the changes in traditional assumptions and practices had been very influential in terms of the choices the women made and how they lived their lives presently. For instance, two of these women were divorced and one was cohabiting with her current partner. Women who had previously adhered to traditional norms felt that they no longer had to work and live within such confines. The women showed flexibility and adaptation over time in regard to their relationships and life.

### 5.3.2 African-Caribbean community mothering

All of the participants played a significant role in caring for family members and also dedicated their time to developing relationships and supporting children and the wider community. Culturally, African-Caribbean women tended to take on this role of caring for older relatives and younger children as it was something that they witnessed growing up and something that they actively were encouraged to do within their culture. For example, all of the women had siblings, and as children they often helped out and looked after them. Three of the women also witnessed their childless aunts take on caring roles and play an active role in children's lives.

Seven participants felt obliged to look after and support their parents. There appeared to be an assumption in the African-Caribbean community that children have to care for their parents when they are older, but because they were childless, it was also assumed that they should be the ones to care for their parents as opposed to their siblings who had children. At times, these women felt that they had little choice but to support their parents as no one else was willing to:

*“It was easier for me to care for my parents as I didn't have children to look after when I came from work, but still no one really asked me what I thought or cared that I might have had other commitments. It's just assumed.” (P9)*

The findings highlighted that as the women had not had children, this inferred that they had no responsibilities; therefore, they should be able to care for their parents. There was no consideration given to whether these women had other life interests or responsibilities which may prevent them from caring for their parents. It appeared that having children is considered as the only 'worthy' responsibility to have.

Three of the women made an active choice to care for their parents and they worked together with their siblings and social care services to ensure that their parents' needs were

met. The roles and tasks they engaged in demonstrated that they focused predominantly on the day-to-day running of the home, such as cleaning, cooking and shopping, and there were some aspects of personal care. The women did not define their role as caring as it would not have been considered a significant enough departure from the usual roles that they had throughout their life course. These women described their roles as being rewarding, as supporting their parents gave them a different type of purpose in life, one which revolved around meeting someone else's needs which in turn made them feel as if they were needed.

The nature of all the women's roles and tasks undertaken changed substantially over time and this was informed by progression and/or change in the needs of the women's parents. The women shared that earlier on in their lives their parents needed support with reading letters and filling out forms. They put this down to the fact that many of their parents had limited reading and writing skills due to their lack of education. However, the women explained that as their parents became older and more infirm, they had to take on a more active role in terms of housework and personal care.

As all the women worked in professional jobs, they worked long hours and had busy weeks. Supporting parents had an impact on some of the women's ability to work full time. For example, P5 temporarily gave up her job as a teacher to nurse her dying parents:

*"My mum had a stroke, my mum had the high blood pressure then as she got older it got higher and higher then diabetes sets in. They said she had a heart attack and a light stroke. So my dad was looking after her. Then he got diagnosed with the cancer so he wasn't able to look after her properly. So I gave up my job and went to move back into the house to look after them both."*  
(P5)

P5 took this opportunity to care for her parents as a way to show them how much she loved them and also to spend the last months with them before they passed away. In her opinion, as a single person who did not have children she found it easier to leave her job and look

after her parents as she did not have many other commitments. This was a theme throughout all the accounts – these women often reduced their hours at work to be able to fulfil their roles supporting their parents.

All the women worked very hard throughout their life course to progress in their education and careers; however, as they were in the later stages of their careers, having worked for over 20 years and in some cases over 30 years, they were not always as invested in their careers and progression as they were when they were younger. Three women reported that if they had had to care for their parents when they were younger and when they were starting out in their careers, they would not have been as willing and/or in a position to support their parents as they were now. The other participants explained that they would have had to negotiate the support they could offer, getting social care and family input, for example:

*“When I had just qualified it would have been difficult for me to balance my career and caring for my parents. I wouldn’t have been able to do it and would have asked my brothers to help. I would have also considered getting social services input. I was so focused on my career, I don’t think I would have given it up to care for my parents full time but now it’s different as I’ve achieved all that I wanted to.”(P9)*

All the women had developed relationships and played a role in looking after children, including nephews and nieces, cousins, godchildren and their friends’ children. The influence of the African-Caribbean culture shaped how some of the women responded to and viewed the children. For instance, from the women’s accounts, motherhood and parenting did not have to be between a biological mother and her child, but it could incorporate and extend to any person who wanted to take on a caring role. Eight of these women saw themselves as mothers within this concept:

*“That’s the Caribbean culture in me. Because in the Caribbean I had an adopted sister. She wasn’t officially adopted. I have a cousin; we’re not sure, we think our uncle is his father but my grandmother took him in and raised him as my cousin. Most families in the Caribbean have a child that really didn’t belong to the home, someone down the street or somebody gave them*

*the child due to hardship in the family. In the Caribbean, you can be a parent to a child who is not biologically yours. I think that part of life I miss. But to some extent, I take it with me.” (P4)*

From the findings it was evident that some of the women’s longing to care for and look after children was associated with the feelings of wanting to be a mother. As P4 stated:

*“We have become godparents. We have three sets now. They come to visit us in summer time and we visit them during Christmas time. I can help others and contribute to other children’s lives by being a godparent. It brings me joy and fills a void of longing to be a mother.” (P4)*

For eight of the women, playing an active role in children’s lives was a way to ‘fill a void’ and also allowed the women to express elements of their perceived gender identity, thus proving themselves as ‘deserving’ of the role of a mother and being a ‘real’ women. The other two women found joy and fulfilment in their relationships with children, whereby they would help to care for and raise the children and have a positive input into their lives. The findings indicate that building these relationships prevented some of the women from being isolated, but they also benefitted from having support from these children in older age if their health and care needs developed.

## **5.4 Themes: Resistance and resilience**

This section examines the women’s varied experiences of racism through the life course and their resistance and resilience in regards to this. It also considers how some of their experiences of institutional racism shaped their educational and career trajectories as well as their pathways to ageing without children.

### **5.4.1 Experiences of racism**

The social and historical contexts (in the United Kingdom) that the participants were either born into and/or lived in following migration formed an important backdrop to their earlier lives. Although African-Caribbean people have had a presence in the United Kingdom

throughout history, most notably through slavery, the 1940s was the first time that a large number of African-Caribbean migrants arrived in the United Kingdom. The participants and their parents were the first and second generations of African-Caribbean people in the United Kingdom. Many African-Caribbean people came to work and contributed to the development of the British economy (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). However, many Black and Ethnic Minority groups were not always welcomed and were often made to feel like they were inferior and fundamentally different from the White community.

Experiences of racism, exclusion and mistreatment were evident throughout most of the women's biographies. It appears that there was no distinction made in terms of women who were born in the Caribbean or in the United Kingdom as they were all perceived as 'outsiders'. Whether they experienced direct racism or indirect discrimination, observed via other family members, every participant had experiences of racism. This included institutional racism on a day-to-day basis which was reflected in schools that had very low or no expectations of Black children and in workplaces where parents were unable to secure jobs or had to work in very low paid jobs with poor conditions. All the women also shared that it was 'normal' for Black people to face social exclusion from housing, churches and shops: *"I recall seeing signs that said 'no Blacks, no Irish and no dogs' on door signs."* (P6)

The derogatory media images and cultural constructions of Black people seen in programmes such as 'Love Thy Neighbour' also contributed to the racism Black people faced. Black people were often described as *"Scary animals, monkeys, who were taking the White people's jobs, women and houses"* (P2). This often led to tension and situations where the participants and their families experienced name calling, taunts, bullying and harassment.

Racism impacted on all aspects of the participants' lives. Seven of the participants reflected on their families' struggles to find secure employment and a decent home:

*"Mmmmm, I mean, errrr, growing up we were raised in shared houses. Back in the day, they use to rent rooms as it was hard for Black people to get houses and good jobs to pay for them. I remember from a young age we were living in the attic. They had stairs. We lived there for a few years and from the age of seven we lived with my mum's uncle in his house with his family. When it didn't work out we had to keep moving." (P2)*

Having to live in temporary accommodation impacted on the participants' childhood development as they lacked stability, structure and routine – their lives were chaotic at times. Experiences of racism left the participants and their families feeling rejected and that they did not belong in the United Kingdom.

Collectively, the women acknowledged that experiences of systematic racism impacted on their identities as they did not feel a sense of belonging to the United Kingdom. Some of the women did not identify themselves as being British, even if they were born in the United Kingdom. For five of the women, holding on to their African-Caribbean identity gave them a sense of self-worth and pride in an environment that often rejected who they were. The Caribbean, in this sense, represented home: a safe and secure place in which they were accepted and belonged.

One of the participants, who migrated as an adult in the early 2000s, also experienced racism; however, her experiences were more specific to her location as she moved to a small village that did not have many Black people living there. As a result, she felt like an outsider and she recalled an experience where someone concealed a job advertisement from her as they did not want a Black person working for them. She had experienced a culture shock, as she had come from an environment where there were all Black people and she moved to an area where she was the only Black person living there.

In conversations about their experiences of racism, it was evident that schooling was a major challenge for nine of the women. The lack of provision for the arrival of children from the Commonwealth during the 1960s and 1970s meant that many schools were often unable to cope with diversity and provided little support in confronting racism. According to Coard (1971), some teachers often assigned many of the ablest African-Caribbean students to the lowest streams and in some instances they refused to teach classes with large numbers of African-Caribbean students. The branding of Black (particularly African-Caribbean) pupils as 'educationally subnormal' led to low expectations and to many pupils being isolated and experiencing low self-esteem and low achievement (Coard, 1971). This was echoed by the participants; for example, participant P2 stated:

*"I left school with no qualifications. We weren't encouraged to do well and were often expected to fail. We had a careers teacher and I had a sense that they used to push us into factory work. At the time we had sets, we were put into sets based on your parents' occupations. My father was a factory worker so I was in a lower set."* (P2)

These experiences disadvantaged four of the women early on in their lives as they internalised the teachers' comments which impacted on their self-esteem and confidence. However, as they got older all four of those participants were able to reject the teachers' comments and worked hard to focus on their goals. The participants' parents were influential in this, as they themselves were very strong and determined people. As they decided to leave their homeland in search of better opportunities, they managed to cope with the challenges of dislocation, isolation, prejudice and discrimination as well as the challenge of getting work, housing and education, exhibiting considerable resilience.

All the participants' parents would encourage them not to give up, which influenced many of the participants who eventually went on to excel academically and subsequently obtain good jobs and careers in their adulthood. The participants explained that their parents' support, as well as the desire to do better and overcome the discrimination they faced,



became a motivation in their lives and they were determined to do well and succeed.

Education was an important factor for many African-Caribbean families as they felt it was a means to enhance their children's life chances and opportunities. There was a sense that parents wanted their children to do better than they had, and although they may not have always had the resources to combat the racism that the children faced, they were very pro-education and actively encouraged their children to go to school and to work hard. It was not always easy for some of the women to overcome some of their experiences and feelings of low self-esteem and lack of confidence. They had many setbacks until they could move forward. The accounts showed the women's complex life journeys, navigating through institutions and environments that were racist:

*"I stayed on at school and stayed on at sixth form. Unfortunately, I failed my exams. I thought the teachers were right, I must have been dumb. It took me years and years to realise they were wrong. For years and years and years, I said gosh, you are crap, the teachers are right, you are a bit dumb. After a while I went to night school. Emmm, I failed initially, but I kept going and kept going and said yeah, I enjoy it and started to pass... Then I had the audacity to think I could do an A Level [laugh] and perhaps at 25 I could aim for university." (P6)*

P6's account showed resilience and determination; despite the initial setbacks she was able to reach her goals. Collectively the women's accounts highlighted resilience and determination throughout their life course; retaking exams, applying for jobs and applying and reapplying for places at university. The women's resilience became stronger in light of positive experiences and outcomes.

Five of the participants explained that they had to find alternative educational routes that allowed them to gain the qualifications that they were unable to gain at school. These qualifications provided the means for many African- Caribbean people to either continue in education or to secure skilled jobs. All of the women in the study had ambitions to get a good education and career and were very determined to reach their goals and aspirations. The slower start and the need to catch up as a result of this disadvantage undoubtedly

impacted on some of the participants' availability and space to think about children. Three of these women had relationships during the time they were studying and progressing in their careers; however, the relationships were not serious and did not lead to marriage at that time. Some of the men they were in a relationship with were either not ready for marriage or they were too busy focusing on their careers to invest time in developing the relationship.

## **5.5 Summary**

Four distinct themes were identified throughout the women's narrative accounts. These themes, which crossed over the participants' entire life course, were loss, identity, resistance and resilience. The findings revealed that the varied experiences of loss and identity construction and the development of resistance and resilience based on their experiences of racism shaped and influenced the women's pathways and contexts to ageing without children. The next chapter will discuss these findings in relation to the current and past research and also highlight areas in which this research appears to make a novel contribution to the field.

# Chapter Six: Discussion

## 6.1 Overview

This chapter examines the key findings and concepts from my study by assessing the extent to which they support as well as contribute to the existing knowledge base. I highlight areas in which this research appears to make a novel contribution to the field. Next, I highlight some of the lessons I learnt, including personal and research focused lessons. I then reflect on some of the limitations of this study and offer a critical appraisal of the use of Black Feminist Standpoint Theory. In conclusion, I present some recommendations for further research and practice.

## 6.2 Gendered pathways

The findings from this study revealed that the pathways to ageing without children are gendered and that women experience distinctive pathways to childlessness. There is currently a limited research base that examines gendered pathways in regards to ageing without children. In line with this study's findings, the few studies available, for example, found that educational attainment and career progression (Keizer et al, 2008) and never having a long-term relationship and never getting married increased the likelihood of women remaining childless (Dykstra and Fokkema, 2000; Dykstra and Liefbroer, 1995; Müller, 1983).

Research has shown that the absence of child-rearing responsibilities seems to have better enabled some older women to devote themselves to career pursuits. These women had lengthy careers and reached relatively high positions in corporate structures (Dykstra and Fokkema, 2000; Dykstra and Liefbroer, 1995; Müller, 1983). In this present study, education and career goals such as passing exams and going to university were a key life course transition for the women. All of the women in the study went on to get a good

education and career and were very determined to achieve their goals and aspirations. However, the slower start and the need to catch up as a result of being disadvantaged due to racism earlier on in life undoubtedly impacted on some of the participants' availability and space to think about children, whereas other women used up some spare time they had waiting for a husband and children to come along.

The findings in my research also indicated that gender played a role in shaping the women's experiences and in this way confirm the findings of other authors whose work has mainly included women from Black African communities (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Larsen, 1995; Tabong and Adongo, 2013; Weinger, 2009). Motherhood was overwhelmingly seen as central to a woman's gender identity and gendered life course, which differs significantly for men (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Larsen, 1995; Tabong and Adongo, 2013; Weinger, 2009). For example, the women in this study were expected to have children due to the cultural norms and traditional beliefs around motherhood and gender roles. This gendering was at both the individual and the socio-cultural levels, which the women reported.

The desire to become a mother was dependent upon individual needs as well as the family's and community's expectations. Research has found that in societies and communities that are underpinned by pronatalist discourses, there is no place for a non-mother who is seen as deviating from social norms and expectations (Ibisomi and Mudege, 2014; Larsen, 1995; Tabong and Adongo, 2013; Weinger, 2009). In line with the current research, it was reported by the women in this study that they faced more social pressure than men to have children and experienced harsher consequences for not having children. It is evident that success in the African-Caribbean community is judged by getting married and becoming a mother: no other roles are able to compensate for not having children. Although the women in this study have careers and are well educated and their parents

encouraged their daughters to get an education, the women's social and religious success was viewed to be more important. Their overall life goal and expected life course transitions were to get married and become mothers. These social and cultural pressures have been proven to put some women at a disadvantage as their entire identities and self-worth were solely based on them having children and getting married. Therefore, not being able to conform to these expectations led the women to be seen as deviant, inadequate and lacking in worth. There was also the risk that some of the women lost their autonomy and agency to choose a life that they wanted to.

The findings hinted at the fact that, unless women moved away from predominantly African-Caribbean communities, it would be difficult for them to avoid the social pressure to have children. Moreover, as African-Caribbean families tended to be large and live close to each other, the women would constantly be reminded that there was a (failed) expectation to have children and being unable to achieve this would result in them feeling like failures in comparison to other African-Caribbean women who had children.

### **6.3 The implications of culture and religion for the pathways to and context of ageing without children**

A shared sense of values and belonging were clearly expressed to me throughout the interviews, as well as the importance of African-Caribbean culture and religious beliefs in understanding the experience of individuals' pathways and the context to ageing without children. However, a focus on cultural identity and the impact of belonging to a specific cultural group are rarely examined in research on ageing without children. In this current study, it was impossible, for example, to understand the context of the participants' experiences without recognising the impact of their culture and background on their lives.

Despite the differences amongst the participants in terms of migration and place of birth, there were key similarities expressed by all of them, as their earlier socialisation had been shaped by a core set of beliefs and practices. The parents of the participants sought to preserve key beliefs and traditions which gave them a sense of who they were and from where they originated. There was an expressed culture, identity and belief system which originated from the Caribbean and was filtered down from generation to generation. This was reflected in everyday practices such as cooking, listening to Caribbean music and speaking patois through to more fundamental beliefs such as views of family life, marriage and gender roles. Hearing stories about homeland and Caribbean traditions were an integral part of participants' earlier experiences, identities and socialisation. Crawford (2004: 98) states: "Diasporic identities are produced and reproduced through the collective memory of a group of people." It is also suggested that cultural bonding takes place through migrants' accounts (King, 2000; Reynolds, 2008) as well as through people's memories of the food, music, language, sights and sounds (Premdas, 1996).

Caribbean culture and religious beliefs that the women related to impacted on their lives. In the individual interviews, the participants outlined how reproduction and motherhood were viewed through cultural and religious lenses. Similarly, the study highlighted how religious frameworks impacted on participants' pathways to ageing without children. The participants utilised such frameworks to inform their understandings of motherhood and procreation and to make sense of their situations. African-Caribbean culture and religious beliefs shaped the ways in which certain practices were viewed as acceptable and permitted. Equally, behaviours and practices that were considered to be unacceptable and disapproved of were also shaped by culture and religion. However, the impact of culture was mediated by other factors within their individual lives such as gender, as discussed above.

In the interviews with the five participants who adhered to traditional practices and beliefs, they confirmed that their views about marriage and procreation meant that they could only have children within marriage as that was seen as the only acceptable way to have children. Not being able to get married, for whatever reasons, served to restrict the potential for a woman to have children, which was evidenced in the cases of at least half of the participants.

The findings also outlined how cultural and religious beliefs determined how these five women pursued relationships. The women did not feel as if they had the autonomy to choose their life partners. This was due to the cultural views in the church and Christian faith about what was appropriate female behaviour. It would be seen as unorthodox for a practising Christian to pursue men romantically. Typically, women would wait for a man to approach them and ask them 'out'. This would limit some of the participants' options as they could not choose the man they wanted. Also, as some of the women were waiting for a specific type of man, namely, Christian and educated, when these men were not available or were unwilling to get married, it often meant that the women chose to delay their childbearing plans in the hope that the right man would come along. These findings are supported by Allen and Wiles' (2013) research that demonstrated that their participants were unwilling to marry and have children with 'just anyone'. The findings in my own study confirmed that four of the women did not get married and have children due to not finding the 'right man'. Koert and Daniluk (2017) suggest that when women follow beliefs and conditions about having and raising children, if those conditions are not met, they may feel they have no other options but to continue to delay childbearing. In some situations, the women would not deviate from cultural and religious beliefs and/or expectations even if there was a risk that they would not go on to have children.

Some studies have argued that there is an 'imagined' and 'ideal' moral and bounded cultural identity and community (Anderson 1983; Atkin and Chattoo, 2007). However, in practice, not all African-Caribbean people willingly follow a moral and bounded cultural identity. For instance, some African-Caribbean people choose not to get married and adhere to traditional gender norms. This has led to some African-Caribbean women, like those in my study who follow traditional beliefs and practices, being unable to get married and, therefore, not being in a position to have children (Reynolds, 2005). Changing and shifting cultural identities and views presented in the public domain can be seen as a threat to the African-Caribbean culture and beliefs, in particular in regard to gender roles and family structure. Research, for example, has argued that due to changes in views on marriage there is a significant number of single parent (mother) households in African-Caribbean families. This has resulted in African-Caribbean people and families being more individualised, which has fragmented the family structure and weakened family ties (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

My study shows that at least half of the women's cultural and religious views have changed and evolved across their life course. They would be considered as being more individualised, as suggested by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). The cultural influences from living in the United Kingdom provided some of the women with insights and outlooks that they would not have normally been exposed to if they had remained living in the Caribbean and/or within an environment that was influenced solely by African-Caribbean culture and religious beliefs. The narratives from these participants demonstrated that some current views on their cultural identity were not based on being Caribbean and Christian *per se*, but varied at different times and at different points throughout the life course. When some of the participants said that they did not define themselves as Caribbean or Christian, they were not necessarily denying their heritage; rather, they were perhaps disassociating themselves from some of the constraints imposed



by its cultural practices and norms and deciding to choose values and practices that best suited them. For instance, from the analysis, it is evident that the changes in traditional assumptions and practices had been very influential in terms of the choices the women made and how they lived their lives presently. Two of these women were divorced and one was cohabiting with her current partner. Women who had previously adhered to traditional norms felt that they no longer had to work and live within such confines. The women showed flexibility and adaptation over time in regard to their relationships and lives.

Identity construction and changing/letting go of beliefs from childhood was a process that took place over time. The complexity of these processes of change was difficult to capture through the women's accounts despite the use of a life course perspective. It was evident that the process was not as straightforward as it may appear. Given that a number of these women lived in environments that had strong traditional and cultural beliefs, the consequences of not conforming to these beliefs would have made it very difficult to change their identities and views easily. The women reflected on and conveyed their experiences in a linear way, perhaps to help me understand their experiences clearly. For example, one of the women (P5) realised from a young age that she did not want to live up to some of the cultural expectations such as getting married and having children. She never intended to have children as she wanted to focus on other ambitions. However, as a child and young adult she felt that it was not possible to challenge cultural norms as it could create tension with her parents and the wider community. When she became an adult she was able to resist the pressures of her family and cultural and religious expectations by moving away and refusing to internalise what was expected and by rejecting some of those expectations. P5 never went on to have children and has remained childless. However, her account did not highlight the complexities of the challenges she was likely to have faced when she was resisting traditional and cultural beliefs and practices.

Parts of the women's conversations reflected experiences of resistance, resilience and autonomy, which were perhaps key to why they did not uphold but rather challenged or rejected some of the earlier cultural norms. The use of a Black Feminist Standpoint Theory provided the ideal framework in which these women articulated their lived experiences, including varied forms of oppression. As Collins (2003) argues, knowledge of Black women can be gained through various forms of oppression. By showing resistance, some women were able to challenge dominant discourses about African-Caribbean women's identity and assumed role in society. Also, by highlighting the participants' shifting identities over the life course this showed that identities can change and be reconstructed; women did not have to conform to social and cultural expectations. Identities can be fluid and open to negotiation.

#### **6.4 African-Caribbean community mothering and ageing without children**

All the participants in this study adopted caring roles towards children, relatives and the community which, to some extent, fulfilled any desire and socio-cultural expectation they might have had to be mothers. It has been suggested that many African-Caribbean women define themselves primarily through their mothering roles and the development of their identities is built on their ability to be good mothers (Barriteau, 1996). Enacting the caring role of a mother allowed some of the participants to express this aspect of their perceived gender identity. This supports research that reports on childless women who engage in the care of nieces, nephews and friends' children (Wenger, 2009).

The concept of community mothering is a useful concept to understand the roles that the women play in relatives' and children's lives. Community mothering can be best described as the role and shared responsibility that women have for vulnerable people and children in

their community to whom they are not related (Sudbury, 1998). In this case, community mothering draws on and reinforces traditional cultural norms of African-Caribbean femininity and womanhood. Historically, through their role as community mothers, African-Caribbean women have worked together to provide care for African-Caribbean children and their community (Reynolds, 2005). For example, between 1973 and 1975, research was conducted with forty-five Jamaican women to determine the dynamics of conjugal relations in the community's belief system (Brodber, 1986). The study found that: "‘taking in’ and ‘growing’ other people's children was common practice for many Jamaican women" (Brodber, 1986: 23). The women treated the children that they were "taking in" and "growing" as blood relatives and they were considered as surrogate mothers (Brodber, 1986: 23). The women and children developed emotional attachments; however, the women were easily able to pass the children back to their parents. The women viewed their role as an act of love but also a way to help support their family and community (Brodber, 1986). Adding to this, Collins (2000) argues that due to the social positioning of many Black women and their lack of access to mainstream institutions of power, they exert power and influence their lives and the lives of others through a series of mothering activities described as motherwork. The women in this study use their power in the home and community to help to support and raise children. Their childless status does not prevent them from fulfilling the role of a mother.

Supporting the concept of community mothering, Allen and Wiles (2013) use the term 'functional parents' to describe adults who also do not have their own children but who are involved in caring for and raising other people's children. In contrast to the traditional ideas of mothering, the findings from my study revealed that mothering is not limited to familial and kinship groups (Barrow, 1996; Reynolds, 2005). This evidences the complexity of defining the term childlessness in this study, and more broadly, and challenges the conventional concepts of childlessness. For example, childlessness implies

that the person without a child lacks having children: “childless, *without* children and *non-parent*” (Allen and Wiles, 2013: 208). However, through the concept of community mothering women can instead define what childless means to them and provide a new context in which it is understood.

The narrative accounts of the participants in this current study, showed that in some instances the women did not always have complete control and power in regards to defining the community mother roles and motherwork they undertook. For example, the findings showed that as African-Caribbean women there was an expectation that they should look after older family and relatives, but also there was an additional layer of expectation placed on childless women simply because they did not have children. The inference is they had no or fewer significant responsibilities, therefore they should be able to care for their parents. In these situations, being childless put these women at a disadvantage, as they would have had little choice in terms of deciding whether they wanted to care for their parents or not. If they chose not to, they would possibly face a backlash from family and the wider community. However, some of the women did choose to care for and look after their older relatives which was associated with feelings of wanting to feel needed. It also filled a void of not having children themselves.

Although my study did not examine the women’s care and support needs as they continue to age, the findings hinted at the fact that building relationships earlier on in their lives stopped many of these women from experiencing social isolation. The findings also hinted that the women’s extended family and social networks would play a role in their future care. Mutual exchange of care was discussed briefly by the participants, which was reflected within the concept of community mothering. As most of the women were still very active, with little evidence of health or care needs, they had not, in common with many other ageing people, considered their support and care needs later on in life. There

have been many studies that have looked at the care and support needs of African-Caribbean elders and they have found that children tend to look after their elderly parents when they have health and care needs, avoiding external support or residential care (for example, Reynolds and Zontini, 2006). However, it would be unwise to assume that this would be the case for all childless African-Caribbean women. Despite the concept of community mothering and that women have strong ties with wider family and friends, they do not have children who would conventionally provide most of their care in old age. This is an area that would warrant further attention and exploration as it is an area that my study did not examine in detail.

### **6.5 Implications of migration for the pathways to and context of ageing without children**

Migration experiences, whether experienced first-hand or via their parents, were a persistent and important biographical thread across the lives of the women in the study. There was diversity amongst the participants who migrated. Three of the participants migrated between the ages of 7 and 10 and one participant migrated when she was an adult. Three participants who migrated as children initially remained in the Caribbean with close family members when their parents migrated and were later reunited with their parents in the United Kingdom.

Parents who migrated to the United Kingdom from the Caribbean during the post-war period often left their children behind initially so that they could find work and somewhere to live, then arranged to later reunite. Although the parent and child separation was common in Caribbean migration experiences (Arnold, 2006), the findings showed that two of the children who were left behind in the Caribbean and then later reunited with their parents experienced emotional distress, as well as adjustment and attachment difficulties

with their mothers and families. The findings highlighted feelings of being in despair due to being disconnected from their mothers. The general issue of 'attachment' has received no attention in the reported literature on ageing without children. Attachment theory has outlined the importance of the child and carer having a secure attachment early on in a child's life and during the formative years (Bowlby, 1969). For example, Bowlby (1969) highlights that if a child has experienced secure, nurturing and consistent parenting they will develop a positive self-image of being worthy, competent and loveable. However, if their parenting is inconsistent and lacking emotional warmth they may see themselves as insecure, unworthy and unlovable. Although attachment styles may be mediated by later, positive relationships and other life events, some of the participants in my research were clear that their early experiences had had a profound effect on their emotional lives across their life course.

The findings suggest that the participants reflected a sense of being 'outsiders' in their newly reconstituted families. Collectively, they struggled with the enormity of the changes in cultural differences they had to face. Where they would hope to feel safe 'at home', two participants (P6 and P8) often felt unwanted and excluded by their wider families and experienced uncertainty about their own identity and place in the family. Their feelings were compounded by seeing their siblings who were born in the United Kingdom being treated as better than them and receiving preferential treatment, which is in line with findings from other research (for example, Arnold, 2006). The migrated parents also had expectations of their Caribbean-born children and of their reunion. For example, their mothers assumed that they and their children would be able to re-establish their relationship with ease and the African-Caribbean children had to set the standard in terms of displaying outstanding behaviour, helping around the house and caring for their siblings. Similarly, research undertaken by Russell-Brown (1997) concerning Jamaican mothers who left their first-born child in Jamaica to migrate found that these mothers believed that

they would reunite with their children successfully, with few difficulties. The study found that some of these mothers had an idealised image regarding a mother and child relationship, not realising that separation, loss and broken attachments could impact profoundly on their relationship. Russell-Brown's (1997) study highlighted that mothers were unprepared for their children becoming attached to their caregivers and the changes in their relationship with their children that followed.

A shared biography which is in line with the life course perspective used in this study was demonstrated in the women's narrative accounts. A shared biography was seen in the ways the participants understood and constructed their relationships with their mothers. Shared biographies were highlighted as a result of experiencing a shared event and experience. Not all shared events are experienced and understood in a unified way. The impact of the migration, for example, was fundamental to a number of the participants in the study and they used their experience and perceptions of migration to explain how it influenced, for example, the manner in which it shaped their relationships and life course over time. However, as I did not interview the participants' mothers it is unclear if they perceived and constructed their relationships with their daughters in the same way.

The emotional distress experienced throughout the reunion and resettlement following migration often continued into adulthood and it impacted on two of the women's experiences of ageing without children. For example, in line with findings from Arnold (2006) and Smith et al. (2004), two of the women had difficulties trusting others and forming securing attachments in adulthood. While there has been some exploration of the impact of earlier migration in adulthood, none of the studies has specifically explored how it impacts directly on women's experiences of ageing without children. An area that is under-investigated and merits further attention is the inability of women who experienced migration to establish relationships later on in life as well as the impact of their earlier

relationships with their mothers. For example, participant P8 felt unable to parent and love a child due to feelings of being unworthy and inadequate, which were directly linked to her earlier migration experiences and broken attachment with her mother.

The two women (P6 and P8) referred to above who were particularly affected by migration and reunion in this study deemed it necessary to have therapy and counselling as a result of their earlier experiences. This helped to resolve some of their previous experiences and manage long-term and persistent feelings of anger and resentment. Accessing counselling and therapeutic services was seen by these women as crucial in repairing, rebuilding and healing some of their earlier experiences and the relationship with parents. This will have implications for support services being offered to women who have had similar experiences (see 6.12).

## **6.6 Impact of loss through the life course on the pathways to and context of ageing without children**

Loss of varied kinds is considered as a potentially traumatic and upsetting event with the potential to disrupt one's life course (Freudenberger and Gallagher, 1995; Koocher, 1986). The findings of my study highlight the impact of parental death, loss of reproductive potential, loss of an unborn baby (miscarriage) or divorce over the life course of the participants. The consequences of loss for the participants were multifaceted and evolved over time. There were variations in how these experiences shaped the women's contexts and pathways to ageing without children.

Through the analytical process it was revealed that the participants' experiences of grief and loss were organised around several key codes, including emotional distress, despair, relief, disruption and continuity. For example, as having children is perceived as a natural



and inevitable milestone within the African-Caribbean community, particularly for women, the interruption of their reproductive plans resulted in a number of participants experiencing emotional distress and despair. Moody and Sasser (2012:2) suggest that transitions and milestones “acknowledge ideals around a shared ‘social clock’, which marks a right and wrong time for age-graded transitions”. This suggests that there is a right and a wrong time to reach particular milestones and transitions through the life course. For example, there was a clear expectation for the women to have had children earlier on in their lives (during what is deemed childbearing age) and as they did not meet this expectation they faced mistreatment and stigma. McGoldrick et al. (2016) make a distinction between normative life course transitions and unpredictable transitions in the lives of individuals. The women’s experiences of unpredictable life transitions, such as loss of the reproductive system, had wider implications for their lives and their pathways to ageing without children.

The loss of an unborn baby through miscarriage or experiencing infertility presented a future with no children, which was distressing for some of the participants in this study. Loss of identity and of purpose in life have been reported by many women following involuntary childlessness (Daniluk, 2001; Exley and Letherby, 2001; Zucker, 1999). Exley and Letherby (2001) found that many women reported personal failure and feeling less of a woman as the result of not having children. Due to popular discourses of ‘proper womanhood’ incorporated in the image of motherhood, childless women may feel as if they are not ‘real’ women (Nicolson, 1998). As a result, some of the women in the study identified a number of knock-on effects due to their infertility or miscarriage in particular, such as depression and losing interest in socialising and previous life goals of being in a relationship. However, in contrast the findings also showed that some women experienced a sense of relief, especially in relation to having a miscarriage, due to the situation and

circumstances not being right for them to have children. It is important to highlight that not all unpredictable or missed milestones lead to distress and sadness.

The death of a parent in childhood was expressed by two participants through the sadness, emotional turmoil and disruption they faced. Their experiences were compounded by the fact that the lead-up to their fathers' deaths was very traumatic, as their fathers were either violent or experiencing mental health and substance misuse difficulties. In addition to this, the deaths were very sudden; thus, they did not have any time to prepare for them. When compared with an expected loss, a sudden loss may be more difficult to cope with due to feelings of initial shock and of being unprepared. This may result in long-term adjustment difficulties and feelings of anger (Lehman et al. 1989). Sudden and unexpected deaths can result in individuals being left with a sense of unfinished business with the persons who have passed away and feelings of guilt (Nickerson et al., 2011). This tends to be the case when someone dies as the result of suicide, which was the case for two of the participants in this study (Cerel et al., 1999; DeSpelder and Strickland, 2011).

The narratives highlighted that seeing the day-to-day struggles of their mothers as single parents following the deaths of their fathers and having to fulfil both roles, as well as the impact of the loss of their fathers, influenced their views on relationships and marriage. The loss a parent during childhood may impact on establishing and developing future attachments and relationships (Nickerson et al., 2011), hindering future efforts to achieve intimacy (Walter and McCoyd, 2009). Participant P1, for example, married someone who she says she knew was unsuitable and, as a result, the marriage ended after a year. She explained that throughout her life course she continued to meet men whom she believed were like her father. This was one of the reasons why she did not go on to have children as she explained that the relationships were not loving and stable enough for her to have children. She desired to have a child in a marriage that was loving and secure. Throughout

her life, she was able to reflect on the situations and consider how they may be linked to her earlier experiences with her father. Despite not being able to have children now, she did not seem to have any regrets; rather, she reconciled her life choices, decisions and circumstances that led to her not having children. However, participant P4 was adamant that she would not be a single parent, which was linked to some of the difficulties she and her mother and siblings experienced when her father passed away. She took steps to ensure that she married a man of 'good' standing whom she believed would not repeat what her father had done.

### **6.7 Resistance, resilience and racism: To what extent do they impact on ageing childless African-Caribbean women's lives?**

The findings from the study showed how the women employed resistance and resilience in shaping both their experiences of racism and the place in which they were having these experiences. The women demonstrated different levels of resistance and resilience throughout their life course. It was evident that changes took place over time; for instance, how someone demonstrated resilience at one point in their lives may not be how they demonstrated it at another (later) point. The women's experiences and the specific circumstances that they were in dictated how they employed resistance and resilience throughout their life course.

Resilience is described as being able to overcome very difficult and traumatic situations and adversities to achieve a positive outcome (Rutter, 2013). Perhaps the most significant finding in this study on the ability to exercise resilience and resistance was in relation to challenging racist practices within educational establishments and subsequently going on to achieve, despite often very difficult educational experiences. The use of a Black Feminist Standpoint Theory provided the ideal framework in which these women

articulated their lived experiences and showed how they sought to resist varied forms of oppression. By demonstrating resistance, some women were able to challenge dominant discourses about African-Caribbean women and their assumed role in society. The women's accounts highlighted their resistance to conforming to social expectations and racist stereotypes. For example, it was expected that they would work in low skilled and lower paid jobs.

Although the women faced discrimination at school, and teachers had low expectations of them, often denying them opportunities, they all went on to higher education establishments and obtained professional jobs. Black feminist and scholar Mirza's (1992) study showed that Black women show agency by continuing to be active agents in determining a positive educational outcome. In line with my study, Mirza's (1992) study also showed that rather than just accepting their poor schooling and limited educational achievement, they chose to re-enter the education system as adults in order to achieve the educational opportunities and qualifications denied to them in their compulsory schooling.

In resisting some of the control exerted over their lives, the women were attempting to regain some power from the teachers and educational establishments. In line with Black Feminist Standpoint Theory, the women challenged negative images and externally imposed ideologies which served to label and oppress them. For example, by accessing supplementary education (African-Caribbean centres) outside of the conventional school environment, the women were able to take action and ownership over their lives and situations. It improved their chances of success and allowed them to become active agents in their own lives.

Garmezy (1987) held an ecological perspective on resilience and argued that protective factors at individual, familial and external levels influence resilience. For example,

individual factors included an individual's attributes, how individuals respond to new situations and their cognitive skills. Familial factors included family cohesion and warmth and the presence of a loving, nurturing environment and a caring and responsive caregiver. External factors include the availability and use of external support systems, institutional structures and a supportive community. Similarly, findings from this study indicated that having the determination to do well and supportive parents played a significant role in shaping participants' resilience and agency. The participants' parents encouraged them not to give up, which influenced many of the participants. Also, education was an important factor for many African-Caribbean families as they felt it was a means to improve their children's life chances and, crucially, create circumstances for a better life than their parents. The participants were aware that their parents wanted them to do better than they had done, which was also a strong motivation to do well.

Extant research has argued that resilience can vary in different contexts and thus it is deemed a process that changes and evolves (Fleming and Ledoger, 2008). This was borne out in my own research where the women demonstrated that their resilience changed over some of their life course, lessening as a result of their experiences of loss, specifically regarding infertility and loss of reproductive potential. Experiencing varied difficulties and stressful situations throughout the life course can impact on an individual's resilience, confidence, agency and self-efficacy (Fleming and Ledoger, 2008). Some of the participants' experiences showed that having resilience was not fixed, but it changed according to their individual experiences and situations and the mistreatment they faced. A number of participants expressed emotional distress and despair as the result of the loss of their reproductive potential and mistreatment by health care providers. When faced with these difficult situations, some of the women did not have the resilience needed to challenge oppressive practices demonstrated by powerful healthcare professionals whom they were in contact with regarding their infertility.

The participants perceived that they were treated harshly and that treatment options were not appropriate, with long-term implications regarding their future ability to have a child. Participant P6, for example, did not feel confident and able to challenge the medical staff's decisions to remove her womb. She assumed that the doctors would not have undertaken the procedure to remove her womb if they did not have to. Alternative treatments were not offered or discussed with her; however, it appeared that a White woman she was in contact with had access to alternative treatments. In these situations, there was evident discrimination and a power imbalance as the women were relying on health care professionals for advice and to offer the best and most appropriate treatment regarding their infertility. The women were not seen as the experts on their own lives in these situations and were not informed about varied treatments options that were best suited for them.

Within the accounts given it was evident that racist, ageist and sexist ideologies permeated the social systems and structures that the women were in, to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural and normal practices. In this context, certain assumed qualities that are attached to Black women were used to justify oppressive practices (Collins, 2000). Research has found that some Black women are viewed as promiscuous and hypersexual and considered as having too many children (Reynolds, 2005). As a result Black women are not seen as being fit mothers; rather, they raise children who go onto commit crime and who repeat the same cycle by becoming single parents (Collins, 2002). Negative stereotypes applied to Black women have been fundamental to the oppression women face in this study. For example, P2 recalls a doctor stating:

*“‘Look at you, look at your age. Why do you want children at your age and not being married?’ I said I haven’t had children and want to have them. She said at your age and your situation its best to have a hysterectomy.” (P2)*

Racist, ageist and sexist ideologies share similar features such as treating dominated groups like ageing Black woman as objects who lack human worth and dignity (Collins, 2000). Within this context, P2 was labelled and pathologised due to racist, sexist and ageist assumptions. She was also made to feel that she was unworthy of having children and experiencing motherhood. Overall it is evident that systematic racism and stereotypes within education and health care services resulted in the mistreatment of the women, impacting on their life course including their resilience and pathways to ageing without children.

There have been on-going reports of Black and Ethnic Minority women being mistreated and experiencing racism within health services. Research has found that many Black and Ethnic Minority women have faced similar experiences in health services, where they are given inadequate treatment and delayed services (Aspinall and Jacobson, 2004; Nazroo et al., 2009). Often these women are perceived as powerless and treated in the same way as the women in this current study, and the women themselves lacked resilience and agency to challenge racist practices (Nazroo et al., 2009). As for a number of the women in this study, the outcome for the women is life-changing in terms of having long-term health implications or, as for participants in this study, not being able to conceive (Aspinall and Jacobson, 2004; Nazroo et al., 2009). However, until now racism and its potential impact have not been considered in the research on ageing without children and key decision making regarding this area. Therefore this area warrants further attention in literature and research.

## **6.8 Lessons learnt**

### **6.8.1 Personal lessons learnt**

In the introduction, I outlined how at the start of the study my culture and identity informed my understanding of the study. Throughout the research process, I had an awareness of the possibility of learning new things, hearing new stories and of being disproved, even if they conflicted with my own values and views. I was aware that my own assumptions and beliefs may be challenged and I was keen to hear different and conflicting accounts.

During the findings and analysis, some of my views and beliefs were reinforced; however, some were also challenged greatly which impacted on my understanding of the research. For example, I learnt that identity can be fluid and can change, depending on the individual and their circumstances; for example, half of the women did not continue to adhere to their traditional cultural identity and religious beliefs in adulthood. However, the other half adhered to cultural norms and religious practices throughout their life course, which influenced their way of life and their choices, such as the belief that marriage is the only institution in which to have children. Such insights made me reflect on my own situation, lived experiences and cultural identity and at times had a profound impact on me. For example, I started to question and challenge the importance and significance of a cultural identity that, at times, puts a lot of restrictions on life and how you live it, which was the case for me in some instances.

### **6.8.2 Research lessons learnt**

Some of the findings from this study support existing research on ageing without children. For example, my study, in line with others, confirmed that individual participants did not make a single decision to be childless but rather earlier life circumstances and life course



experiences influenced trajectories, and hence later life outcomes. For example, marrying late, never meeting the right partner and being unwilling to parent at any price, including avoiding having children outside of marriage (Allen and Wiles, 2013; Connidis and McMullin, 1996), as well as circumstances outside their control such as loss of an unborn baby and being unable to conceive a child influenced pathways to ageing without children (Allen and Wiles, 2013; Dykstra and Wagner, 2007; Wenger, 2001).

The majority of the research and literature on ageing without children focuses its attention on the experiences of White British and European childless adults. Therefore, the similarity regarding the findings as noted above would suggest that some of the experiences faced regarding the pathways to ageing without children are more to do with life experiences which can affect all women from varied backgrounds, ethnic and religious groups and are less to do with their African-Caribbean heritage. However, while it is evident that my own research would broadly concur with the general findings on research on ageing without children, none of the research has examined the experiences of African-Caribbean women ageing without children. Thus this research study makes a novel contribution as there are currently no reported studies that explore the life course experiences of childless African-Caribbean women ageing without children.

Some of the findings from my study suggest that experiences throughout the women's life course were specific to their heritage and their subsequent status as older women who were ageing without children. For example, the findings have highlighted how religion, African-Caribbean culture, migration, racism and intersectionality have shaped the women's pathways to and context of ageing without children. These factors and key life events are not examined and considered in the current research available on ageing without children. Generally, one of the oversights in the literature on ageing without children is that not

many studies showed how a range of different key life events and factors through the life course shape individuals' experiences and pathways to living without children.

This current research has contributed to the research and literature that currently exists on ageing without children. My research highlighted a number of important themes, which are as follows:

- Traditional gender, religious and cultural views regarding children and marriage are widely held in aspects of the African-Caribbean community and were found to limit some of the women's autonomy and freedom to choose an alternate lifestyle.
- Childless African-Caribbean women face a specific disadvantage due to not conforming to the expectations of having children. For example, they are at risk of being questioned and treated less well than women with children.
- If childless African-Caribbean women remain in communities with high numbers of African-Caribbean people, they are at risk of facing on-going stigma and mistreatment. Those individuals who were able to resist some of the cultural norms and traditions had to move away from areas where the African-Caribbean community is more prevalent. These women were able to transcend those challenges and thus challenge the assumptions often made about women ageing without children.
- Earlier experiences of migration had implications for the poor relationships between the women and their mothers and siblings, as well as the relationships the women established in adulthood. Being unable to form attachments in adulthood impacted on some of the women's ability to have children.
- The impact of experiencing varied loss such as the death of a parent and loss of reproductive potential throughout the life course shaped the women's relationships, outlooks and contexts to ageing without children.

- Resilience built throughout the life course changed depending on individual circumstances. Different levels of resilience and resistance had implications in terms of the resources, ability and agency that individuals had in particular situations.
- Intersectionality (race, gender and age) and institutional racism experienced throughout the life course shaped the women's experiences within education and health care provisions, which had implications for some of the women's pathways to ageing without children.

The findings also suggest that some of the experiences faced by the women in the study are not based solely on the fact that they are childless. It is evident that a number of their experiences are about being African-Caribbean and/or an ageing woman – regardless of whether children are involved or not. For example, African-Caribbean culture and religious beliefs assume all African-Caribbean women should have children, which could arguably limit all African-Caribbean women's choices and autonomy to choose a life that they desire. The findings also showed that all African-Caribbean women were expected to look after relatives and play a role in children's lives; however, these expectations increased when a woman is childless due to an assumption that they have more time and fewer responsibilities. Other findings suggest that the mistreatment and racism that the women experienced in the health care services were based on them being African-Caribbean and older unmarried women as opposed to being childless.

## **6.9 Limitations of the research and what I would do differently**

In evaluating and reflecting on the research process a number of learning points have emerged. Some are factors I would plan to take account of if I were to engage in a similar piece of research and others may help in the development of future research studies and ideas. For example, this study was based on a small sample of ten childless African-

Caribbean women. The knowledge produced in qualitative research is not generalisable; therefore it is not possible to assume that all African-Caribbean women ageing without children are represented in this thesis.

I found that the use of qualitative methods, namely, semi-structured interviews with a life course focus, showed how the women's social, cultural and religious contexts as well as earlier experiences shaped their present-day lives. I was also able to gain an insight into the women's life transitions or, in many of the women's cases, their experiences of not achieving expected milestones. All of this enabled me to gain a deep insight into the women's lives and gather rich and detailed data on the women's life course experiences to address the research questions. Although a life course perspective is seemingly quite valuable to understand the experiences of those who are ageing without children and the complex intersections (culture, religion, gender and age) of ageing childless women's lives, studies invariably do not use a life course perspective which would be appropriate to consider the influence of life course experiences on the contexts and pathways to ageing without children.

Nevertheless, the sole use of semi-structured interviews with a life course focus did have some limitations. For example, they did not provide the possibility for more unstructured discussions on areas that were important to the women and that they may have wanted to discuss. Also, I found that this approach limited the way the women could convey their narratives. As the women were very descriptive and talked vividly about their life experiences, the use of drawings, artwork, sensory methods or photographs would have enriched their accounts. Thus, if I had an opportunity to do the study again, or to develop the research further, I would seriously consider visual methods to explore the women's life course experiences. For example, photographs representing the lives lived pre- and post-migration could have enriched the accounts they provided regarding the image of the

‘idealised homeland’ and the ‘new’ country. Sensory methods could also be employed to enrich the discussions around food. Rajan-Rakin (2018) argues that there are no longer limitations to the methodologies that are used in sociological research. Researchers have become more creative and use non-linear and fluid approaches. For example, the use of creative methodologies that focus on movement, rhythm and visual and audio mediums, as well as sensory methods that include the use of smell and touch, all present new ways of knowing and provide new ways of understanding the social world (Elliot and Culhane, 2017; Ingold, 2011; Lyon, 2018).

My persistent challenges in recruiting a sample meant that I focused recruitment on snowball sampling, online sources, churches and newspapers, and I found that this limited the types of African-Caribbean women who came forward and participated in the study. Due to the sample bias towards a particular religious and socio-economic background and confined geographical locations, the women’s experiences of childlessness discussed could not capture the full diversity of African-Caribbean childless women. For instance, one could question what the findings would be if the women had no religious affiliation or were from lower socio-economic backgrounds?

Caribbean communities are very diverse, as discussed in the literature review. Therefore, it would be insightful to hear the experiences of varied Caribbean women and to assess whether the experiences vary or stay the same depending on the specific type of Caribbean background one is from. If I had an opportunity to do the study again, or to develop it, I would attempt to broaden my recruitment methods to include women from across the United Kingdom, using different mediums to attract diverse Caribbean women, and would use various research methods such as unstructured interviews and images.

## **6.10 Critical appraisal of the use of Black Feminist Standpoint Theory**

My research was underpinned by Black Feminist Standpoint Theory. While there are studies that use Feminist and qualitative approaches in the context of ageing without children, the use of a Black Feminist Standpoint Theory remains relatively unexplored. My research offers a new contribution to research due to the methodology employed.

The importance of Black women in developing knowledge and understanding of Black women's experiences is central to Black Feminist Standpoint Theory. Black Feminist Standpoint Theory is rooted in the experiences of oppression and in particular the experiences of Black women. The existing framework used for Black Feminist Standpoint Theory focuses on and represents the experiences of African-American women (see 3.5, Black Feminist Standpoint Theory). The focus on one particular group has been criticised as it fails to consider varied experiences and the diversity within the Black community (Reynolds, 2005). Black Feminist Standpoint Theory often represents the poor, inner city and deprived angst-ridden experiences of Black women, often providing one-sided perspectives (Reynolds, 2005). This hinders the understanding of the different social, cultural and political contexts that other Black women live in and the way in which their cultural and gendered identities are situated within specific geographical locations (Hall, 2001).

In using the current Black Feminist framework, I found that it did not always apply to the experiences of African-Caribbean women. African-Caribbean culture, migration experiences, religion and racism (experienced in the United Kingdom) played a significant role in the women's life course experiences and contexts of ageing without children. These areas are not considered in the current Black Feminist Standpoint Theory. Mirza (1997)

argues for the development of a Black British Feminist Standpoint that recognises the distinctive migration pattern of Black women from Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, for example, and the effects of this migration in shaping their knowledge and their engagement with the collective struggle and political activism. Reynolds (2002), who is an African-Caribbean British author, argues for changes to be made to the current Black Feminist Standpoint Theory so that it becomes a more inclusive model of Black womanhood and takes a more diverse approach to understanding Black women's lives so that our lives can be successfully captured.

A fundamental component of Black Feminist Standpoint Theory is the view that Black women produce a specialised knowledge that clarifies a particular standpoint of and about Black women. As noted by Collins (1990:15), this involves an "interpretation of Black women's experiences by those who participate in them". Therefore, I was able to start from this basic premise when using Black Feminist Standpoint Theory in this study. The women were encouraged to tell their own stories in their own authentic voices and then I ensured that the women's culture, religion, migration experiences and experiences of racism were clearly stated. Within this study, I used Black Feminist Standpoint Theory to:

- (i) capture the voices of African-Caribbean women ageing without children; (ii) put African-Caribbean women at the centre of the study; (iii) recognise the women's culture, religion, migration experiences, experiences of racism and ageing without children; and
- (iv) offer an alternative perspective to the current Black Feminist Standpoint Theory.

Black Feminist Standpoint Theory was important in this study as it offered an alternative representation of women ageing without children. It also provided the women with the opportunity to articulate a discourse of ageing without children that positions their racialised experience at the centre. By emphasising the differences regarding Black

women's experiences the study was able to evidence the interplay between race, class and gender.

### **6.11 Implications: Research**

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of life course experiences on the context of and pathways to African-Caribbean women ageing without children. The findings of this study provided an understanding of the lived experience of this phenomenon. Future research may confirm or extend the previous research in several ways:

- A longitudinal study could further provide additional information about how the experiences of ageing without children change over time. It would be interesting to see how the meaning and experience of childlessness shift and change throughout the life course and how women reconstruct their lives and identities over the life course.
- An area that was not explicitly discussed in this research was care needs and support for African-Caribbean women ageing without children. As it is often assumed within part of the African-Caribbean community that children will care for older parents with acute health and care needs, the question here would be who looks after childless African-Caribbean women as they age and care needs increase, and what options are available?
- Due to the relative homogeneity of the participants in this study, research with more diverse groups might provide an insight into the roles of varied ethnicities and cultural contexts in shaping the meaning and experience of childlessness. By extension, future research could explore the phenomenon with women who reflect more diversity in terms of geographical location, education, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. It is also recommended that studies consider researching varied migrant groups and the impact of migration processes.
- As this study was a small-scale study, it would be beneficial to undertake larger studies and/or comparative studies of Caribbean communities in the United Kingdom and



in the Caribbean to see if there are any distinct differences. This may provide a more thorough and deeper insight into the subject area.

- Using triangulation, mixed methods and a range of methods could also improve validity and may also enable the findings to be generalised.
- Another area that could be expanded on is the experiences of African-Caribbean couples ageing without children. In this study, the lack of suitable and willing partners was a significant reason why some participants decided to delay or forego their childbearing plans. As such, research on the role of partners in women's reproductive decision appears to be warranted.
- The application of Black Feminist Standpoint Theory and intersectionality to further studies on African-Caribbean women will allow for knowledge to be generated around the unique experiences of African-Caribbean women who live between the intersections of life. Its use will also serve to challenge dominant discourses and theories that can lead to negative images and constructs about Black women.
- In order to further understand the lived experiences of African-Caribbean women, further studies could explore how intersectionality (culture, gender, age and class) impact on African-Caribbean women's pathways to and contexts of ageing without children.
- As racism experienced through the life course, in particular in education and health care provisions, had implications in regards to the women's contexts and pathways to ageing without children, more research could be undertaken in this area to better inform decision making and practice.

## **6.12 Implications: Practice**

The women in this study outlined how fibroids and mistreatment by health care professionals contributed to infertility and further complications that led to them not being able to have children. This research has shown that some of the women in the study felt

very strongly that they had experienced discrimination and institutional racism which was reflected in delayed responses, inaccessible information and unsuitable treatment options. It is important that these findings inform health professionals' practice. When considering the needs and issues experienced by African-Caribbean women, targeted and bespoke health interventions that reflect the African-Caribbean community may be better placed to address such health issues. Professionals should deliver health interventions in a culturally sensitive way, such as providing accessible information on the implications of fibroids and offering service and treatment options. Many of the women did not know they had fibroids until later on, so it is important to inform women how to detect early signs and symptoms and to explore suitable and varied treatment options.

Two participants deemed it necessary to have therapy and counselling which was crucial and necessary in terms of repairing, rebuilding and healing from some of their migration experiences and the broken attachments with their parents. Therapy and counselling practitioners and providers will need to consider the implications of this and what training is needed to ensure they are equipped to help women address these issues.

### **6.13 Summary**

This chapter has highlighted how the findings of this study supported and expanded on current and past research. It has also highlighted areas in which this research appeared to make a novel contribution to the field. While my own research would broadly concur with the general findings on research on ageing without children and the broader research on the Caribbean community, it is generally the case that much of the published literature in these areas does not comment on the experiences of ageing without children within a social, cultural and religious context. My own research, therefore, offered a significant departure from the main focus of research on ageing without children. I have identified the specific

contribution my thesis makes to the existing literature on ageing without children and to broader research. In conclusion of this chapter, I have reflected on some of the lessons learnt and limitations of this study, offered a critical appraisal of the use of Black Feminist Standpoint Theory and presented some recommendations for further research and practice.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The primary aim in undertaking this research was to examine the impact of life course experiences on the contexts and pathways to African-Caribbean women ageing without children. The study had a particular focus on two main areas: (1) culture expressed in terms of the participants' beliefs and cultural identity; and (2) how beliefs, cultural identity and life course experiences have shaped the participants' context and pathways to ageing without children.

The findings showed that the women's experiences and pathways to ageing without children were complex and they involved a range of factors. The reasons for childlessness were varied and were rarely the outcome of a single decision. This study was useful in highlighting the multiple trajectories and shifting identities over the life course of those who were ageing without children. The diverse narratives pointed to the many ways childlessness can occur across the life course and how losses can be managed and revisited in later life. For example, the women's experiences of loss, which were reflected in the loss of a parent in childhood or divorce and infertility in adulthood, were identified as central to shaping some participants' experiences of ageing without children.

The women's accounts also identified that each unique situation was associated with considerable trauma and distress. An example of this is seen in regards to the loss of an unborn baby through miscarriage or not being able to have a child due to infertility. This presented a potential future with no children, which was distressing for some of the participants in this study. Research has found that this is true of interruptions to the reproductive life course (Exley and Letherby, 2001; Letherby, 2002), as having children is perceived as a natural and inevitable milestone within the African-Caribbean community, particularly for women, and this was the case for some of the participants. As a result,

some of the women in the study identified a number of knock-on effects due to their infertility and miscarriage in particular, such as depression, losing interest in socialising and in previous life goals of being in a relationship. However, in contrast the findings also showed that some women experienced a sense of relief, especially in relation to having a miscarriage, due to the situation and circumstances not being right for them to have children. It is important to highlight that not all unpredictable or missed milestones lead to distress and sadness.

While it is evident that such findings build on, and add to, existing literature within this research area, the findings also departed from it. Crucially this study brought into view that experiences throughout the women's life course were specific to their heritage and their subsequent status as African-Caribbean women who were ageing without children. This was evident in their migration experiences and experiences of racism and intersectionality, as well their cultural and religious identity. For example, early life socialisation influenced participants' cultural and religious identity and beliefs on marriage, children and family life. Marriage was viewed as a normative expectation in adulthood and an essential status before having children.

Cultural and religious contexts also determined how the women were treated and perceived. For example, some childless African-Caribbean women faced specific disadvantages due to not being able to conform to the expectations of having children. Specifically, five participants were directly told when growing up that they should only have children within marriage and if they did not have children they would be considered as abnormal. The analysis revealed that due to not conforming to these expectations some of the participants were stigmatised and assigned negative attributes and they received harsher treatment than childless men in their community. Their experiences involved name calling and being openly ridiculed, as well as being isolated and treated less well than

women with children. Seven of the women faced these experiences throughout their adult lives; it appeared to steadily increase when they reached their thirties. This is in line with general trends, as there is an expectation that women should be having children at this point in their lives.

Migration experiences and experiences of racism and intersectionality, as well their cultural and religious identity, for example, are not currently examined in the current research on ageing without children. Generally, one of the oversights found in the review of literature on ageing without children is that not many studies showed how a range of different key life events and factors through the life course shape individuals' experiences and pathways to living without children. To date, there are no available studies that examine African-Caribbean women's experiences of ageing without children.

Although this research cannot be generalised in the positivist sense of the word, it does, however, provide new knowledge by showing how an individual's experiences can be influenced by the cultural, social and religious contexts they live in. In doing so, this study has also provided an insight into areas that we know very little about and has bridged the gap between disparate pieces of research identified in the literature review, which together offer a clearer and more robust understanding of African-Caribbean women ageing without children as well as providing a contemporary qualitative Black Feminist British perspective.

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## **Appendix One: Literature Review Methods**

As a part of the research process a review of the literature was undertaken, which provided a framework and context within which to locate my study. In order to gather the research and literature needed to gain this context, I used an integrative literature review. An integrative literature review evaluated and synthesised the existing literature on the research areas (Torraco, 2005). The use of this approach helped me to gather, critically assess and report on relevant and representative literature. Petticrew and Roberts (2006: 81) state “the aim of the literature search is not to retrieve everything. It is to retrieve everything of relevance, while leaving behind the irrelevant.” For this thesis, I was aiming to write about and assess the ‘state of the art’ in terms of current knowledge and understanding of ageing without children.

When I started thinking about the research area, I established that there was no coherent body of knowledge about Caribbean women – and in fact no thoroughgoing studies of Caribbean women ageing without children. So, the literature review provided an important context but also highlighted some critical gaps. I took an integrative approach to pull all the relevant literature from a diverse range of areas to contextualise my study. I drew upon positions from disciplines such as Black studies, gender studies, ageing studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies and migration studies to contextualise the study. Gaining this broader context was also important as it enabled me to see the current state of research and literature around the research areas in order to form an understanding of key themes, storylines and concepts.

The foundation for the literature searches and the examination of the literature were informed by a Black Feminist Standpoint Theory and a reflexive approach. In short, this meant I asked myself how the literature and research could be used to better understand

childless African-Caribbean women's experiences and whether these studies represented childless African-Caribbean women's experiences and voices accurately. By asking such questions I ensured that the research and literature reviewed were appropriate in underpinning the study.

This research examined the experiences of African-Caribbean women ageing without children. The two key areas that the study focused on were as follows: first, culture expressed in terms of the participants' beliefs and cultural identity; second, how beliefs, cultural identity and life course experiences have shaped the participants' pathways and context to ageing without children.

In order to identify literature on the research areas, I followed the procedure set out by Bell (2005). This involved defining key topics and subtopics related to the key research areas which I used as search terms. See Table 4 (key topics are in bold text).

**Table 4: Literature search key terms**

<b>African-Caribbean women</b>	<b>Older childless women</b>
<b>African-Caribbean women's migration</b> African-Caribbean/Caribbean women in Britain Migration from the Caribbean Windrush Jamaican/Caribbean migrants African-Caribbean/Caribbean women Black women in Britain Caribbean migration Racism Intersectionality Racism and the Caribbean community	<b>Ageing without children</b> Defining childlessness Growing old without children Old age and childless Childless in old age Pathways to ageing without children Contexts to ageing without children Older childless women Social networks and older childless adults Relationships and childless people Care and care arrangements amongst the childless
<b>African-Caribbean cultural identity</b> African-Caribbean/Caribbean food African-Caribbean/Caribbean culture African-Caribbean/Caribbean language Black Caribbean culture African-Caribbean/Caribbean religion Religion in the Caribbean African-Caribbean/Caribbean people	<b>Childless Black/African-Caribbean/Caribbean women</b> Black women living without children Childless Black women Ageing childless African-Caribbean/Caribbean women Older childless Black/African-Caribbean/Caribbean women Black and childless African-Caribbean/Caribbean and childless Culture and religious contexts of childless African-Caribbean/Caribbean/ Black women
<b>African-Caribbean/Caribbean Families</b> African-Caribbean/ Caribbean families African-Caribbean/Caribbean families in Britain African-Caribbean /Caribbean children and families African-Caribbean /Caribbean parenting	<b>Perceptions of Childless women</b> Perceptions of childless Black women How are childless Black women perceived? Stigma and childlessness Ethnic minority women and childlessness
<b>Ageing African-Caribbean/Caribbean population</b> Ageing African-Caribbean/ Caribbeans Older African-Caribbean/Caribbean migrants Ageing British African-Caribbean/ Caribbeans	<b>Coping strategies amongst childless women and ethnic minority groups</b> Managing negative treatment as a childless woman Developing resilience when faced with challenging situations Resilience and racism Resisting oppression Resistance amongst Black and Ethnic Minorities

To conduct a broad but systematic review of literature using the search terms in Table 4, I undertook an electronic search of library and journal databases and catalogues at the University of Lincoln. This provided an effective way to identify literature on the research areas from varied sources such as books, articles, the internet and reports. Journal bibliographies were also utilised to find other resources. Following the procedure outlined by Bell (2005), I began by selecting the key topics and subtopics areas shown above in Table 4. The search terms were consistently used when searching for resources. I then defined the terminology and parameters (time, period and geography of publications). I also began to use the Boolean operators of 'and' and 'or'; 'or' broadened the search while 'and' narrowed it (Bryman, 2004).

When searching using the term ageing without children, 3,643 resources were identified. Literature was found mainly in the *Journal of Marriage and Families*, *Journal of Family Issues*, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, *Journal of Women and Aging* and *Journal of Aging Studies*. As I aimed to generate a comprehensive understanding of the research areas within a set amount of time, the articles in these journals were examined by assessing the titles and abstract reviews. When I assessed the titles and read the abstracts I found that the majority of the studies were not relevant to the research areas. For example, most of the studies looked at childless younger women, infertility treatment, and health and psychological consequences of not having children. Also, some of these identified resources were inaccessible. Boolean operators were then identified for this aspect of the review. I used 'and' to narrow the search terms and to identify relevant articles. I was able to identify a few studies that focused on contexts and/or the pathways to ageing without children and that looked at the implications in terms of lived experiences. To identify further seminal texts, key articles found were further explored by their reference lists.

I then undertook the same search process as above when identifying research on ageing African-Caribbean/ Black and childless women and adults. The search terms used in Table 4 identified a number of articles (301) from journals such as *Anthropology and Medicine*, *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, *Pregnancy and Childbirth*, *Gender and Society*, *Reproductive Health Matters*, *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging*, *Journal of Women and Social Work*, *Nursing Research*, *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice* and *Qualitative Health Research*. However, on further exploration of abstracts I found that most of these resources were not relevant to the research area and/or inaccessible. None of these studies looked at the experiences of older or ageing childless women and adults; all the relevant studies focused their attention on younger Black African childlessness women and adults. Due to the lack of research in this area, I also searched on the internet to see if I could identify any research looking at the experiences of older African-Caribbean, Black and Ethnic Minority childless women and adults. However, there were no available studies or literature identified.

Using the same review process, I then sought after research and literature around the African-Caribbean community, looking at key areas such African-Caribbean women's migration, racism and the African-Caribbean community and African-Caribbean identity using the key terms identified in Table 4. Some terms such as 'African-Caribbean community' and 'African-Caribbean identity' produced a number of resources. However, searching with terms such as 'African-Caribbean women's migration' and 'African-Caribbean women in Britain' produced a very small amount of literature. In order to identify more literature in these areas, I used the bibliographies of studies identified to find further resources. I identified some articles from journals such as *Attachment and Human Development*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Canadian Woman Studies*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* and *Journal of International Women's Studies*.

As there is limited research on ageing without children in the United Kingdom, I have drawn mainly on studies from Europe and North America. I also selected data from the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries as I needed historical information regarding Caribbean migration as well as up-to-date information on contexts and ageing without children and related areas. Overall, the literature search showed that there were no available studies exploring the experiences of African-Caribbean/Black and or Ethnic Minority women who are ageing without children, nor were there any known studies which looked specifically at a cultural and religious context of African-Caribbean women ageing without children. Based on the limited research available on African-Caribbean women ageing without children within a cultural and religious context, I have reviewed literature on the experiences of younger Black African women without children and Ethnic Minority groups, paying close attention to the cultural and religious context they live in and how they are perceived and treated in the society that they live in. This allowed me to conjecture the implications for African-Caribbean women ageing without children who may live in similar environments to the individuals in those studies. Despite the limited number of studies on the African-Caribbean women, I used the available resources to provide insight into the African-Caribbean identity, migration and motherhood.



## **Appendix Two: Ethical Approval Letter**

## Appendix Three: Newspaper Article



### **Social worker plans Ph.D. study on childless Caribbean women**

Shona Willock wants to make contact with women over 45 to learn about their experiences

**Written by Poppy Brady**



**SOCIAL STUDY:** Childless women aged over 45 are being asked to take part in a study  
A BIRMINGHAM-born social worker is hoping to speak to a number of first-generation  
older Caribbean women who are childless, as part of academic research she is working on  
at Keele University.

Shona Willock, whose Ph.D. study is in social gerontology, wants to make contact with women over 45 to learn about their experiences of childlessness and how the courses of their lives have been influenced by this.

Shona, 30, who studied for her first degree at the University of Birmingham, said:

“Research on ageing without children is now of growing interest and it is a subject I feel passionate about.

“Studies and literature available on women ageing without children tend to be from a White British and European perspective with research overwhelmingly neglecting experiences of women from diverse cultural backgrounds.

“Older Caribbean women’s personal stories or accounts of childlessness are likely to differ from White women without children. Consequently, the aim of my research is to examine how life course experiences and cultural/religious identity shape – and have shaped – ageing Caribbean women’s pathways and experiences of childlessness.”



### **STUDIES: Shona Willock**

Shona is keen to stress that the women's identity can be protected and interviews would be held at a mutually agreeable time. She is aware that some information may be sensitive and reassures those considering taking part that this would be handled properly and discreetly.

She added: "There are no obvious or immediate benefits to taking part in this study – however, it will provide an opportunity for you to talk about your experiences as well as giving a voice to a little studied group."

Those wishing to contact Shona can do so by emailing her at: [s.s.willock@keele.ac.uk](mailto:s.s.willock@keele.ac.uk)

## Appendix Four: Advertisement Poster



SHONA WILLOCK DOCTORAL RESEARCH

CANDIDATE AT KEELE UNIVERSITY

JULY 2016

Shona Willock, whose Ph.D. study is in social gerontology, wants to make contact with women of Caribbean origin who are over 45 to learn about their experiences of ageing without children and how the courses of their lives have been influenced by this.

The aim of this research is to explore how culture, religion and life course experiences have influenced subsequent experiences of ageing without children for African-Caribbean women.

Overall, I am interested in hearing about your experiences and thoughts. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of African-Caribbean women who are ageing without children as this is an area that is largely under researched.

I am keen to stress that the women's identity will be protected and interviews can be held at a mutually agreeable time. I am aware that some information may be sensitive and reassure those considering taking part that this would be handled properly and discreetly.

Those wishing to contact me can do so by emailing me at: [s.s.willock@keele.ac.uk](mailto:s.s.willock@keele.ac.uk)

# **Appendix Five: Information Sheet and Consent Form**

## **Information Sheet**

### **Invitation**

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study

**‘Examining the impact of life course experiences on the context and pathways to Caribbean women ageing without children’.**

This project is being undertaken by myself, Shona Willock. I am a part-time doctoral student at Keele University.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. You can ask me if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

### **Aims of the Research**

The aim of this research is to explore the pathways and context to ageing without children and how life course experiences have influenced subsequent experiences of ageing without children for Caribbean women.

The research will examine two key areas: (1) culture expressed in terms of the participants' beliefs and cultural identity (2) and how beliefs, cultural identity and life course experiences have shaped the participants' pathways and context to ageing without children.

Overall, I am interested in hearing about your life course experiences and thoughts. The aim of the study is to gain better understanding of Caribbean women who are ageing without children as this is an area that is largely under researched.

**Why have you been invited?**

You are being invited to take part in this study because I understand that you are an African-Caribbean woman who is over the age of 45, who does not have children and has never been a parent.

**Do I have to take part?**

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not in this study. I am happy to answer any further questions that you have about the study before you decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part in the study you will be asked to sign two consent forms: one is for you to keep and the other is for my records.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving reasons. If you decide to withdraw partway through the process, I will talk to you about whether the information you have provided during the

interview can still be used for the purpose of the study, or whether it should be completely withdrawn from the study.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

If you decide to take part the researcher, Shona Willock, will interview you.

I will contact you via the contact details you have provided. Interviews will take place between March 2016 and November 2016 in a location and at a time which is mutually convenient. Interviews will last no longer than two and a half hours. If you would like, the interview can be broken down into more than one meeting. In situations where I will be unable to undertake a face-to-face interview with you, alternatively, if you are in agreement, the telephone and/or Skype/Facetime will be used.

I will ask your permission to use a digital tape-recorder to audio record the interviews. The interviews will then be transcribed (written up) and, should you wish, you will have the opportunity to review your transcribed interview(s).

### **What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?**

There are no obvious or immediate benefits to taking part in this study.

However, it will provide an opportunity for you to talk about your experiences as well as give a voice to a little studied group; and help us understand a little of what life is like for women in this situation.



**What are the risks (if any) of taking part?**

Talking about matters which are personal to you can be potentially sensitive. Therefore, great care will be taken to address this through careful question design, regular breaks and ensuring that you have sufficient information so that you fully understand what the research is about and what is likely to be asked of you. You can also decide not to answer any questions that you do not want to.

I can also provide information on a range of local support services and online resources that you can access for further help, support and advice at any point during the research process. I will offer information about resources and support services that are tailored to your particular circumstance.

**How will information about me be used?**

After the interviews are undertaken, I will transcribe the interviews and analyse them. This will help me to answer the research questions. I will then produce a report/thesis. The information collected will also be used for future research projects, plus other outputs such as articles for academic journals, publication, books and to be discussed in academic forums.

The interview transcripts will be anonymised (your names and/or personal details will not be linked to your interview) and stored securely on a computer with a password only known to me.

**Who will have access to information about me?**

Myself as the researcher and my supervisors will have access to all participant interviews. Your real names and personal details will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. However, your confidentiality may be breached if you share information that may cause risk of serious harm to yourself or someone else. This will be discussed with you prior to consent being given in writing. I will also explain if I need to breach confidentiality in this way.

There may be potential challenges to ensuring complete privacy in this study. For example, some participants in the study will live in the same local community, so even if your names have been hidden, your circumstances or views may reveal your identity. Maintaining confidentiality also becomes challenging when discussing services. For example, there are a small amount of services that cater for the African-Caribbean community and therefore participants might attend the same groups and services. However, in order to address these issues, I will, if privacy or anonymity is threatened, work jointly with you to change recognisable information – or exclude identifying information, for example, occupation and service providers. I will need to discuss these issues with you and be guided by your views on this matter.

**Who is funding and organising the research?**

The research is not funded and I am conducting the study at Keele University.

**What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions.

**Name of researcher:** Shona Willock

**Type of Study:** Part-time Doctoral Research Candidate

**Discipline:** Social gerontology

**University:**

Keele University

Staffordshire

ST5 5BG

**Email address:**

[s.s.willock@keele.ac.uk](mailto:s.s.willock@keele.ac.uk)

Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you should contact my personal supervisor:

Dr Ala Sirriyeh

Lecturer in Sociology

Email: a.sirriyeh@keele.ac.uk:

Address:

Keele University

Staffordshire

ST5 5BG

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:

Nicola Leighton

Research Governance Officer

Research & Enterprise Services

Dorothy Hodgkin Building

Keele University

ST5 5BG

Email: [n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk](mailto:n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk)

Tel: 01782 733306



1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated ..... (version no .....) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions

☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntarily and that I am free to withdraw at any time

☐

3. I agree to take part in this study

☐

4. I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication

☐

5. I understand that although data will be anonymised because of my role it may be possible that I could be identified in reports and publications

☐

6. I agree to the interview

☐

7. I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects, publication in journals/books and to be discussed in academic forums

☐

8. I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects

☐

**For Focus Groups/Interviews\***

If you consent to participate in this study, it should be drawn to your attention that the researcher has a professional obligation to act upon any aspects of poor practice and/or unprofessional behaviour that may be disclosed during the research activity. Researchers should use the appropriate reporting mechanisms if they have witnessed or experienced poor practice and/or professional behaviour



1. I agree for my quotes to be used

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2. I do not agree for my quotes to be used

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3. I understand that although data will be anonymised because of my role  
it may be possible that I could be identified in reports and publications

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# **Appendix Six: Interview Topic Guide**

## **Interview Topic Guide: Participants Who Migrated**

**Study Title: Examining the Impact of Life Course Experiences on the Context and Pathways to Caribbean Women Ageing Without Children**

### **Aims of the Research**

The aim of this research is to explore how life course experiences have influenced subsequent experiences of ageing without children. Ageing without children refers to ageing women who have not had children and have never been parents.

Overall, I am interested in hearing about your experiences and thoughts. The aim of the study is to gain better understanding of Caribbean women who are ageing without children as this is an area that is largely under researched.

You are reminded that you can decide not to answer any questions that you do not want to and you are also free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving reasons.

### **Initial check list**

- Name:
- Age /DOB:
- Country of origin:



- Geographical location:

### **Three sections of the interview**

#### **Section 1: Prior to migration and reasons for migration: Migration experiences and the experience of being a first-generation Caribbean woman.**

##### **Key areas**

- Country of Origin
- Life in the Caribbean (family life, upbringing, earliest experiences, education, standard of living, role responsibility in the family)
- Parents' migration (did parents migrate first, what was your understanding of this, how old were you and how did you feel when they left, who looked after you?)
- What led to you migrating (facilitator, purpose of migrating, chosen destination, feelings about leaving the Caribbean and migrating and what age did you reunite with your parents)?
- Migration route (mode of transport, who you migrated with, year of migration and age when migrated)
- Migration experiences (personal views, aspirations, challenges)

#### **Section 2: Exploring earlier childhood**

##### **Key areas**

- Initial experiences in the United Kingdom (settlement, standards of living, discrimination, language and cultural barriers, relationships and social networks established)
- Early life experiences and family life (family life including parents, siblings and wider family, relationship with family and who you lived with, upbringing and who raised you, how you were parented, for example strict, loving, earliest experiences in education, housing, standard of living, roles and responsibilities in the family)
- Cultural identity (what does being Caribbean mean, maintaining cultural norms and traditions, has it changed and how is it practised in UK)
- Religious beliefs and values and implications of them
- Personal aspirations (education, employment, family life, marriage)
- Motherhood/gender expectations (what are your own personal views about motherhood and where do your beliefs on this come from)

### **Section 3: Life course experiences**

#### **Key areas**

- Key life events and how they have shaped/influenced subsequent experiences (looking at why you haven't had children, what led to you not having children, did your early life experiences and/or your Caribbean upbringing influence your pathways to childlessness)
- Personal experiences and implications (challenges, positive influences, discrimination, barriers, deaths, marriage, divorce)
- Responding to and managing difficult situations – skills, abilities, techniques

### **End of interview check list**

- Summing up at the end of each section of interview
- Snowball (snowballing techniques will only be used if the situation is appropriate and I will be sensitive to the individual circumstances and contexts of each participant)
- Ensure contact details are provided
- Leave follow-up information/sheet

### **Interview Topic Guide for British born African-Caribbean Women**

#### **Study Title: Examining the Impact of Life Course Experiences on the Context and Pathways to Caribbean Women Ageing Without Children**

#### **Aims of the Research**

The aim of this research is to explore how life course experiences have influenced subsequent experiences of ageing without children. Ageing without children refers to ageing women who have not had children and have never been parents.

Overall, I am interested in hearing about your experiences and thoughts. The aim of the study is to gain better understanding of Caribbean women who are ageing without children as this is an area that is largely under researched.

You are reminded that you can decide not to answer any questions that you do not want to and you are also free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving reasons.

#### **Initial check list**

- Name:
- Age /DOB:
- Parents country of origin:
- Geographical location:

#### **Three sections of the interview**

##### **Section 1: Early life experiences as a British Caribbean woman**

##### **Key areas**

- Parents' country of origin
- What led to your parents migrating (purpose of migrating and chosen destination)
- Early life experiences and family life (family life including parents, siblings and wider family, relationship with family and who you lived with, upbringing and who raised you, how you were parented, for example strict, loving, earliest experiences in education, housing, standard of living, roles and responsibilities in the family)
- Life in the United Kingdom (education, standard of living, employment and housing, discrimination, language and cultural barriers,

relationships and social networks established, environment, culture, traditions, values, language, festivals)

- Personal experiences (challenges, positive influences, discrimination, barriers, aspirations, death, marriage and/or divorce)

## **Section 2: Exploring how culture/beliefs shape – and have shaped – the women’s experiences**

### **Key areas**

- Cultural identity (what does being second-generation Caribbean mean, maintaining cultural norms and traditions, and how is it practised in UK, ‘cultural clashes’ and expectations)
- Religious beliefs and values
- Personal aspirations (education, employment, family life, children)
- Motherhood/gender expectations (what are your own personal views about motherhood and where do your beliefs on this come from)

## **Section 3: Life course experiences**

### **Key areas**

- Key life events and how these have shaped/influenced subsequent experiences (looking at why you haven’t had children, what led to you not having children, did your early life experiences and/or your Caribbean upbringing influence your pathways to childlessness)
- Personal experiences (challenges, positive influences, discrimination, barriers, aspirations)

- Responding to and managing difficult situations – skills, abilities, techniques

**End of interview check list**

- Summing up at the end of each section of interview
- Snowball (snowballing techniques will only be used if the situation is appropriate and I will be sensitive to the individual circumstances and contexts of each participant)
- Ensure contact details are provided
- Leave follow-up information/sheet

## **Appendix Seven: Pen Portraits of Participants'**

### **Demographics**

Participant One: British born woman of Jamaican origin. She was 56 at the point of interview and lived in Hastings. She would consider herself as a Christian but takes a more liberal approach to it; however, she has firm views about having children within marriage. She was previously married and experienced a miscarriage. Since then she has not remarried; therefore, in line with her religious views, she did not have children.

Participant Two: British born woman of Jamaican origin. She was 52 at the point of interview and lived in Birmingham. She is a practising Christian. She has never been married; she is in a relationship with her partner. She had fibroids and experienced discrimination by health care services which led to her being unable to conceive.

Participant Three: Jamaican born woman. She was 63 at the point of interview and lived in London. She was raised in a Christian household; however, she changed her religion in her early thirties. She has never been married; she is currently dating. She had fibroids which led to her being unable to conceive.

Participant Four: Trinidad and Tobago born woman. She was 53 at the point of interview and lived in Hertfordshire. She is a practising Christian. She got married later on in life and is currently still married. Her and her

husband tried to have a child; however, she was unable to conceive due to being menopausal.

Participant Five: British born woman of Anguillian origin. She was 46 at the point of interview and lived in Birmingham. She is a practising Christian. She is single and was intentional about not having children. She made an active decision about not having children which was influenced by varied factors such as her work commitments and not meeting the right person.

Participant Six: Jamaican born woman. She was 56 at the point of interview and lived in London. She was raised in a Christian household; however, she does not practise a religion now. She has never been married and she is single. Her earlier experiences of migration and broken attachments and having a diagnosis of fibroids led to her being unable to have children.

Participant Seven: British born woman of St Lucian origin. She was 54 at the point of interview and lived in Bedfordshire. She would consider herself as a practising Christian; however, she is not a frequent church goer. She was previous married and is now divorced. She had fibroids which impacted her infertility at the time of her marriage. In line with her Christian beliefs, she would only have children inside marriage. She is currently single and therefore has not gone on to have children.

Participant Eight: Jamaican born woman. She was 62 at the point of interview and lived in London. She was raised in a Christian household;



however, she is not affiliated with a specific religion, rather she would consider herself as being spiritual. She had two unplanned pregnancies and subsequent miscarriages. She never planned to have children due to the impact of her migration and earlier life experiences.

Participant Nine: British born woman of Jamaican origin. She was 51 at the point of interview and lived in Birmingham. She is a practising Christian. She has never been married and she is single. She had a miscarriage following a brief relationship, and has never been pregnant again.

Participant Ten: British born woman of Jamaican origin. She was 51 at the point of interview and lived in London. She is a practising Christian. She has never been married and she is single. She had fibroids which impacted her ability to conceive.

## **Appendix Eight: Verbatim transcript of a coded interview with participant 6 (P6)**

P6: Emmm, my name is P6 and I was born in Jamaica and I currently live in East London.

Interviewer: Thank you for introducing yourself on tape, P6. We have went through all the interviews forms and I just wanted to confirm that you agree to take part in the interview today.

P6: Yes, we have went through the paperwork and I agree.

Interviewer: Just to explain how the interview will be structured. So, it will be broken down into three parts, using the interview sheet as a guide.

However, for the most part it will be just a conversation between us both, looking at your life and your journey to not having children. If at any time you feel tired, don't want to talk about a particular topic and want a break we can stop the interview. So just let me know. Just checking, do you have any questions?

P6: Errrrrr, no.

Interviewer: Okay then, shall we start? Emmmm, let's talk about migration experiences, before you and/or your family came to the UK from Jamaica and the reasons for migrating. Thank you.

P6: Okay, well, [pause] I was born in Kingston, Jamaica. I can't remember much prior to migrating as I came here when I was seven. Well, I remember little things like school, the beautiful scenery and the weather. Oh and fresh food. [Laugh] I don't really like thinking and talking about that time of my life anyway so that's why I probably don't remember.

Interviewer: Sounds lovely. So you came here when you were very young. So do you remember how your migration journey went, like who organised it, why you migrated and who you came with?

P6: So [pause] I was left with my step-dad's mother in Jamaica. She has now passed on. (Code=left behind in the Caribbean) (**Theme=Loss of the Caribbean**) I really don't want to talk about that part of my life.

Interviewer: That's fine, I am sorry to hear about your loss.

P6: So my mother migrated here first and she saved up and sent for me, an older sister, brother and another older sister. I wasn't told why we were migrating and when, it just happened. (Code=lack of preparation regarding migration) (Code=broken attachment) (**Theme=Loss of stable relationships and connection with their mother**)

Interviewer: So you all came together?

P6: No, the girls came first and my brother came later on.

Interviewer: Okay, did you come with someone or by yourself and how did you get here?

P6: I came with my older sister. Errrrrr, I came on the plane. I don't remember much about the journey; other than it was cold coming here.

Interviewer: Did your mum ever talk about why she left Jamaica?

P6: My mum never talked about Jamaica at all as she didn't get on with her in-laws. Well, she does talk about them but in a negative way [laugh].

Interviewer: Okay, so when you arrived who did you come to live with?

P6: Errrm, I came to live with my mum and my step-dad.

(Code=reconstructed families)

Interviewer: Oh yes, as they were already settled here. And where did they live in the UK?

P6: They first came to live in BXXX.

Interviewer: So why did they live in BXXX? Was that their choice? Or did they have family there already?

P6: Well, errrrm, I don't know. I visited, I visited a place where my mum use to live in BXXX before I came. She moved to AXXX and then rented, as back then a lot of Black people couldn't get good jobs that paid well to buy their own place. (Code= discrimination) But eventually they bought a property in LXXX. Then we joined them.

Interviewer: I just wanted to say I know AXXX really well; not too far from where I live [laugh]. Interviewer: So did you go straight into school when you can?

P6: I can't remember primary school that much but I remember junior school. But yes I did. I went to TXXX school but it no longer exists. I remember I had to stay an extra year as my English wasn't very good and I was struggling.

Interviewer: Struggling? Did you speak patois?

P6: Yes, I spoke patois, that's all I spoke. ( Code= Caribbean language)

Interviewer: How did you find communicating with other children and teachers and them with you?

P6: I can't remember much about my earlier school years [sigh]. But all I can remember is that it was difficult to get on. I found the work hard and the people strange. (Code=difficulties adjusting and settling in)

Interviewer: Why was it difficult and strange?

P6: Well, it was the weather. Ummm, making friends wasn't very easy. I don't know whether it was the language or whether I looked different, being Black, or whether I was expecting something but it wasn't easy. Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever experience racism?

P6: At school there was calling of names. But it was mainly outside.  
(Code= name calling) Say I was sent to the shop to buy something ...emmmmm. I would be stood there and I would be ignored. So I would be ignored and someone else would come in and would be served. I went to one particular shop just at the end of our road and I asked for something and the lady would say what are you saying, what are you saying, and would just stare at me. I not sure if I said it wrong and she couldn't understand. I had to say it repeatedly. She was, she was mocking me, saying you Black, this, you Black that. (**Theme=Racism**)

Interviewer: Sorry to hear that you had to experience that. Were other people in your family exposed to similar experiences?

P6: My mum, errrrrr. Well, now she talks about when she first came and says it was horrible. She was treated like an animal. It's not nice to hear the way she speaks. I think my brother experienced things at school too but he never talked openly about it. When he left school I think he wanted to be a fashion designer something like that, errrrrr. He was just rubbished as it wasn't the profession you were meant to go into as a Black person.

(Code=mistreatment) (**Theme=Racism**)

You know, I remember when I went to a careers office when I was older, about sixteen. And I said I wanted to be a social worker and...errmmmmmm...I wasn't encouraged! The career officer talked about being a chambermaid and told me that jobs like this were more for me.

(Code=discrimination) (**Theme=Racism**)

Interviewer: Why would they say you should be a chambermaid?

P6: Exactly, or why not a care assistant?

Interviewer: Or nurse?

P6: Exactly! Even if he said yeah, you want to be a social worker but it's going to be difficult and you have to study and work hard then I would accept that. Black people weren't expected to do jobs like that. (Code=low expectations)

Interviewer: Did any teachers support you in your goal to be a social worker?

P6: Some of the teachers were kind in the girls' school. But, errrrm, you would know, if they didn't want you to progress. Say, when, like I was fourteen at the girls' school, I asked to move, to be put up a class as I was bored with the lesson and I wasn't learning. I wanted to do a bit more. And I was just told no! I just wanted to do more and I was told no! Nobody said let's see what you can do and see if you can go into one or two classes to do exams. (Code=low expectations)

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

P6: Well, you know, I didn't feel good in myself and felt crap about my ability. And then I failed my exams. I thought the teachers were right. (Code=impact on self-esteem/low self-esteem) It took me years and years to realise they were wrong. Because I was in the lower class from day one I wasn't prepared for anything. If I had been in, errr, a higher group from the first year and had that level of work, I would have managed, errrrmmm, the exams. Because I wasn't and suddenly had to do all this work, no wonder I failed. Then for years and years and years I said gosh, P6, you are crap, the teachers are right, you are a bit dumb. (Code=impact on self-esteem/low self-esteem) I decided not to let them keep me down so after a while I went to night school. Errr, I failed initially, but I kept going and kept going and



said yeah, I enjoy it, and started to pass. (Code=determination)

**(Theme=Resistance and resilience)**

I realised if that had happened in my first year in school then I would be in a different place by the time I was twenty.

Interviewer: You did so well to triumph over those initial difficulties...so tell me more about the schools you went to and your experiences there.

P6: I went to SXXX school in BXXX and then I went to RXXX school. Then that school closed so we went to a comprehensive site in SXXX.

Interviewer: How was education viewed in your family/household? What were your parents' view on it?

P6: For my mum it was very important. Everything was education, education, education. It doesn't matter what else you did, you must learn. (Code=the importance of education) Because that will get you a good job, that will get you a good job and you will be stable. (Code=parents having ambition for their children) She never said if you learn to do English and read my English will improve. She never knew what to do herself. She just expected us to go to school and learn and come out with good grades. She didn't know how the school system worked here. (Code=parents unsure of the British education system) Where she comes from, if you went to school and misbehaved the teacher would clout you. That's the end of that. Don't

go home and tell parents as they will give you another one. And if you studied hard you would do well. She doesn't realise that here like a lot of Caribbean children they don't expect you to do anything. (Code=low expectations)

Interviewer: Was there little expectation for you and other Caribbean children to do well?

P6: The majority in my class was Caribbean; lots from Jamaica. I ran around with a group and they were all Jamaicans. All of us were treated the same, very low expectations for us.

Interviewer: Was it helpful to be surrounded by people from your own cultural background?

P6: Yes, but I lived in a mixed community. On my street there were many Black families. They lived just a couple of doors down and we knew them well and got on. My mum went to church. We knew a lot of families there. We also had good neighbours, Mr and Mrs G. They were White neighbours. My brother, he knew friends across the road. (Code=close knit Caribbean community)

Because we lived with other Black people, it limited the racism around us. Apart from occasional racism in the shops and in the streets. My mum experienced worst. We had name calling and stuff, I just ignored them. The

worst of it came later on when I was older, when you actually realise what they are saying and doing to you and that you are geared up to fail.

**(Theme=Racism)**

Interviewer: Do you mean when you were an adult or older teen?

P6: Well, throughout my life. Errrrmmm, I realised when I asked to move up a class I didn't realise why I wasn't allowed to move up. There was a White girl who also asked to move up and she was allowed to move up. I don't know why she is allowed to move up and I wasn't allowed to move up. It started there.

Then also when we had a careers day in school. The stuff we were shown was very uninteresting. We saw other classes going to things like to the Navy and Army. We went to shoe factories. We were geared towards factory work. I do remember going to a shoe factory and visiting a clothing factory. I said it's very good work and decent work but I don't want that. It would drive me mad. (Code= low expectations) **(Theme=Racism)**

Interviewer: Were you encouraged to do anything other than those jobs?

P6: My mum wanted us to do well but she wasn't able to say what that looked like, she just wanted us to do well. It could have been anything. My mum was a cleaner and she didn't want us to do that as it's hard work, low pay and no appreciation. She also complained about the patients being

racist to her and the nurses did nothing. So although she wanted us to do well and steered us in the right way she didn't know how to combat the racism. (Code=parents not knowing how to challenge racism)

(Code=mistreatment) (**Theme=Racism**)

Interviewer: So tell me more about your mum and family growing up. Who was in your family and what was your family life like?

P6: My mum. My step-dad I can hardly remember him at all, they separated in the late sixties, early seventies and he went off to America.

(**Theme=Loss**)

Interviewer: What about your biological father?

P6: I didn't know my biological dad. He died in 1983. Then it's my brother and I've got two older sisters and then me. I have two younger sisters who were born here. One passed on. (**Theme=Loss**)

Interviewer: Really sorry to hear that.

P6: Errrrm, that's our family. My mum is still in BXXX. I visit her quite often. I'm going next week. Last week we came to BXXX and she showed me where she used to live in the different areas. She showed me the street where she used to live. There is a mosque there. She wanted to knock the

door. I want to do a family history thing. Because she is getting on, when she goes that information will go with her. (**Theme=Identity**)

Interviewer: That is really helpful for your identity, especially about your life in Jamaica.

P6: Yes, I agree. But the Jamaica bit is completely lost [laugh] and the thing is she didn't get on with any of her relatives. Jamaica to her is negative. The other week she said I would like to go there as she has never been back.

(**Theme=Identity**)

Interviewer: What is your relationship like with your mum?

P6: Errrm, family life was not easy, as when I came to join her from Jamaica I didn't know her. (Code=broken attachment)

Interviewer: So when did she come to Britain and leave you behind?

P6: Errrrmm, I was born in 1960 so she must have come here when I was four. Then she has two children born here and they had stayed with her. They had preferential treatment; the bee's knees. Because they were born here and they had an attachment with her which I worked out later. (Code=sense of being othered)

Interviewer: What caused this to happen?

P6: Our attachment was broken. I did hear from her as there was letters but they would have been practical letters. (Code=broken attachment) Errrrm, she is not an emotional person. Because she didn't get on with her in-laws. I don't think there would have been trust so the letters would not have been about how you are feeling. Feelings are not a part of her life. You clean, you have food in your belly and a roof over your head. Somewhere down the line feelings might come into it but it's way, way down the line. (Code=absence of emotional input) (**Theme=Loss**)

I think it's something to do with how she was raised as she wasn't raised with her parents. (Code=parents impacted by their own upbringing) But, ermmmm, I think out of all of her children it is the oldest children who would be the ones to look after her if anything went wrong and lend her money. The one that was born here is a mean bitch [laugh].(Code=resentment towards her British born sister) The sister that is born here is so mean. I rarely have contact with her. Errrr, I see my brother and other two sisters. I don't know what happened. The ones that were born here and had everything seem to be the least likely to help out when she needs it. (Code=British-born siblings being treated better)

Interviewer: So, did being apart impact on your relationship with your sisters and mum?

P6: Yes, as when we came over from Jamaica, we were washed, we were dressed and we were fed. That affection wasn't there [crying].

(Code=absence of emotional input) (**Theme=Loss**)

Interviewer: I will get some tissues.

P6: We have never bridged that gap [crying].

Interviewer: Should we stop for a little bit?

P6: It's okay. Somehow we have never been able to bridge that gap. She's nice but she's not huggy nice. (Code=absence of emotional input)

(Code=broken attachment) (**Theme=Loss**)

Interviewer: Are you able to speak to her about how you feel?

P6: I don't think she understands. I may be wrong but she brought us here, she's housed and clothed us and she feels that she has done right by us. But what she doesn't understand is that the emotional side is missing. She was mean to me but was able to give it to the youngest two because they stayed with her all the time. I think she does feel it but she simply doesn't know how to show it [crying]. (Code=feeling like an outsider) (Code=broken attachment) (**Theme=Loss**)

Interviewer: Are you okay?

P6: Yes, I am fine.

Interviewer: We will talk about some parts of your life that may bring up some emotions so if it becomes too much we can just stop anytime. Just let me know. Are you happy to carry on?

P6: Yep! I have thought about it long and hard. I still have a relationship with her but it's not the kind I like, you know, where you sit down and talk about things properly. Errrr, our conversation is more superficial. We never talk about deep things, it just doesn't happen. She is getting on and not well. (Code=absence of emotional input)

Interviewer: So it was your separation during migration that impacted on your relationship with your mum. Why did your mother come to the UK without you and your siblings?

P6: Yes, it was. Errrrm, simple economics. A better life. She didn't have enough money for us all to come with her. When my mum came here she worked as a seamstress earlier on but it didn't pay and when she had her first child the dad didn't stick around. So, errrm, she was on her own. (Code=parents' migration experiences)

Interviewer: So where did she live when she came? Shared home or room?



P6: When she first came here she lived in a room initially with a family which wasn't great, very poor accommodation. She had to move on from there. And the second one was in a room as well but I think she had more space in AXXX and then she moved.

Interviewer: Why did she move?

P6: I'm not sure if she had friends that moved there so we went were and she knew she had support. Or was it a better job? I've never asked that one; I will have to ask.

Interviewer: Just wanted to also ask about your own experiences of migrating. Did you want to come here and did you have any hopes?

P6: I didn't have any choice to come here as I was sent for, like my siblings. I was very young and just had to get on with it. (Code=migration experiences) (**Theme=Loss of the Caribbean**)

Interviewer: When you came, did you have any particular expectations of you and responsibilities that you had at home or role?

P6: Errrm, yes, as Jamaican children you were expected to do housework and help your mother run the home. My older sisters would help to cook and watch the kids. When my older sisters left, I took over. But because I

didn't have the relationship with my mum it didn't last long as I eventually left. It went down to the younger sister. (Code=cultural expectations)

Interviewer: So when did you leave home?

P6: I left home at twenty. Because...what happened? My step-dad had moved to America and my mum decided to go to visit him in America with his two children.

Interviewer: Your younger sisters?

P6: Yes. I was not asked to go. I was not asked to go. I know I was working but I was not asked to go. So I thought if you are not going to ask me I don't see the point of being here when you come back, so I decided to move on, which I did. By then, our relationship was so strained and difficult I was happy to just leave and start a better life for me. (Code=moving on)

**(Theme=Resilience)**

Interviewer: Did you get a place of your own?

P6: First of all I moved in with my sister and when she got a council place I moved in with her there for a little while. Then I rented with a friend and then a couple of friends and got a place with my own. Then I decided I've got a couple of O Levels. I can do an A Level, then if I get that I can go off to university. Then that's what happened there. (Code=determination)

Interviewer: So that's a great starting point to talk more about your experiences as you growing up in the UK. Let's talk about your experiences after school in education. If that's okay?

P6: I went to school and then I wanted to go into the sixth form; stayed a year to get some CSEs, which has now long gone. And I failed those. Then I thought the teachers are right, I'm an idiot. (Code=low self-esteem) I was then unemployed for a little while after I left school and went on a training scheme with the council. Then when a job came up in a postal room, errrm, in the place where they dispatch salaries, errrm, I was asked to apply for it and then I got it. (Code=determination)

Interviewer: Was that your first job?

P6: Yeh.

Interviewer: Well done.

P6: My mum was very proud of me...very, very proud which made me feel there is at least something she liked about me. I did keep in touch when I left but we still didn't have a great relationship.

Interviewer: So what led to your current career path after this initial job?

P6: So after I failed my school exams I started working at the council. Then a year or two later, I went to college just generally. I did some O Levels, Sociology and History. I stayed on at school and stayed on at sixth form. Unfortunately, I failed my exams. I thought the teachers were right, I must have been dumb. It took me years and years to realise they were wrong. For years and years and years, I said gosh you are crap, the teacher are right, you are a bit dumb. After a while I went to night school. Emmm, I failed initially, but I kept going and kept going and said, yeah I enjoy it, and started to pass... Then I had the audacity to think I could do an A Level [laugh] and perhaps at 25 I could aim for university. (Code= determination) **(Theme=Resilience)**

By then I had got a couple of O Levels and I had been in the same job for a while and didn't particularly want to do that forever. I then took an A Level and failed that and took it again and passed. I then applied for university. I thought when you get to 30 you need to do what you need to do, and even if you decide once you've studied and you've done social work you don't want to do it then that's fine. (Code=aspirations) What you're not going to do is hit 60 and have regrets. So that what I did. **(Theme=Resilience and resistance)**

Interviewer: So why social work, as you mentioned that from the beginning of your interview?

P6: I don't have a clue. I didn't know any social workers. No one in the family are social workers, I don't know where it came from. Apart from my mum doing caring roles and assistant nursing. I may have saw something on the telly. I don't have a clue until this day. I remember I told the careers officer I knew that's what I wanted to be and didn't get any support. So I thought go and do it.

Interviewer: So how long have you been practising for?

P6: For a long time. I qualified in 1996. Then I moved to LXXX. I studied there.

Interviewer: What made you go to LXXX?

P6: I lived in BXXX all my life, I knew every crack in the pavement. And I just wanted to get away where I didn't know anyone and start afresh. If you study somewhere where you know people – distractions.

So I said, go, go away and really challenge yourself. So I applied for BXXX, BXXX and LXXX. I wanted a university that was in the centre of stuff and that has a mixed community and to be able to get a proper placement. Because someone said apply for Oxford and stuff like that. I said excuse me, how many people like me are in Oxford? Give me a break. I thought how would I get a placement in Oxford. So I didn't apply for those places. So I got an offer at two places. Oh, I went to SXXX as well

but they said they want me to have a maths pass. I was thinking are you kidding me, as I can just about add up.

Interviewer: I think it's mandatory now as you have to have maths and English. Even though you don't use maths in the job.

P6: So, yes, I have been practising for 20 years now in children and families services. (Code=education)

Interviewer: So let's talk about being Caribbean living in England. What did it look like? For example, was your culture maintained and in what ways? For example, food, traditions.

P6: Oh yes, a mixture of things. We definitely had the special front room and I do remember all the pretty cushions. And the cabinet and the gram. There is an exhibition, a guy had written about the 'Caribbean front room'. It was in London and I went to see it. When I saw it I thought it was our front room. We had that, we had that and we had that. It was odd, it was just like our front room. It was a big room and this was the size of the front room. You had the sofa and the gram and the cabinet in it. I thought how odd, as it looked like our front room and it wasn't until I left I realised I didn't go in. I bought the book and it was a wonderful book and I bought it for my mum.

The front room was their world and their way of creating a space for themselves. I remember when the pastor used to come it was the only time that we were allowed to go in the front room. When mum used to work we would say to each other are you going in, and we would say we would tell mum that you went in. Things have changed now though. (Code=cultural beliefs and traditions) (**Theme=Identity**)

Interviewer: Did you have traditional dishes?

P6: Errrm, we had traditional food but mum would make an effort for my sisters who didn't eat Caribbean food. They would have a mixture to begin with and then they decided they didn't want any Caribbean food. We eat it. If the older ones said we didn't want any of the food she would say you've got to eat it. But with the two younger ones she would cook something different for them. (Code=sense of feeling othered) (Code=cultural beliefs and traditions) (**Theme=Identity**)

Interviewer: What did you prefer?

P6: I prefer the Caribbean one. Strange, but in school I ate English food and liked that as well. I also occasionally had some of the food she cooked for my younger sisters.

Interviewer: So what did you like to eat?

P6: Mum would cook stew and dumplings which was really nice. She would do ackee and saltfish which was really nice and yummy. On Sundays we would have chicken and rice and peas. Every Sunday we would have a lovely breakfast; fried breakfast with plantain and hot chocolate and she would put Caribbean crackers it. Whatever she did on Sunday we would always have a lovely breakfast and dinner; it was a treat. (Code=cultural beliefs and traditions) (**Theme=Identity**)

Interviewer: Was patois spoken in your home?

P6: My mum spoke patois for years and years and years. It's going now but occasionally it comes out, but we couldn't speak it. Also, she didn't want us to speak it as she thought we would get on better if we didn't speak it. So every time something came out she would correct us. (Code=changing your identity to fit it) (**Theme=Identity**)

She wanted us to mix with everyone and have better opportunities. I was a part of Guides. She would never say don't do things in the White community and we had piano lessons when she could afford it. Yeh, we did everything. Despite her lack of education and lack of money she wanted us to do different things. She never stopped us. It wasn't restricted at all. We went to days out and did lots of things. She would never said you couldn't do that. (Code=wanting a better life for your children) (Code=aspirations)

Interviewer: As a family did you do things together?



P6: Very rarely as she worked long hours. We would go to the park. She would throw her 'pardner' money and we would go to Butlins. That was really good and we had corned beef and cheese sandwiches. She made an effort for us. She would take us to the playground. And when BXXX carnival started she would take us there. She would work quite a lot.  
(Code=parent working to support the family)

Interviewer: Did you do things with the wider Caribbean community?

P6: We knew a lot of Caribbean Christian people and were expected to go to church as children and live a Christian life, being obedient to our parents and what the Bible said about waiting to get married before having children. Mum would have people coming and we would have prayer meetings with her and we could go in as we were allowed in the front room then. The pastor would come occasionally. As the years went on a Pentecostal church started about 10 minutes from us. We knew everyone in our community. If my mum didn't go to work with these people she knew people through church. So we knew these people. (Code=cultural beliefs and traditions)  
(close-knit community) (Code=importance of religion) (**Theme=Identity**)

Interviewer: Are you a part of a faith now?

P6: When I was younger, I adhered to all the religion I was raised to but I haven't been to church for donkey's years and I wouldn't class myself as

being a Christian now. I am happy to live the way I please. (Code=change and not maintaining cultural beliefs and traditions) (**Theme=Identity**)

Interviewer: You mentioned that you were expected to be obedient to what the Bible said about waiting to get married before having children. Did/do you still adhere to this belief?

P6: Yes, I do. Oh okay, I definitely did want children. I wanted a family. (Code=desire to have a family) I wanted to have children in marriage. Two people raising the children, two people responsible and two people being able to talk to each other if it goes wrong and also financially too, as that was the right way to do it. (Code=adhering to traditional norms about marriage and children) (**Theme=Identity**) It didn't work out like that. When I finished studying I had a growth in my stomach and I found out it was a fibroids. It was very big. I ignored it for a while. (Code=medical issues causing infertility)

Interviewer: Did you know that you had fibroids?

P6: I knew something was going on years before that. In BXXX, I went to the doctors and they said it might be constipation. So I changed my diet and everything. But, errrm...say I ate a sandwich it felt like a tonne of bricks in my stomach. It felt heavy. But by the time they diagnosed me I found out that it was fibroids, the size of a grapefruit and needed to be removed. (Code=medical issues causing infertility)

Interviewer: Did this impact on you having a child?

P6: The doctor explained. I still query it now but can't do anything about it, that, errrr, if something went wrong I would need to give them permission to remove my womb. I signed the form, stupid me. I thought I could trust the doctor. I wonder now if I could trust the doctor. And then they removed it. I think now, did they really need to remove my womb? (Code=discriminatory practices) (**Theme=Loss**)

Interviewer: I am really sorry to hear this. When did this happen?

P6: I finished my exams in 1996. After my exams. It was in August or September I did it. When I was told earlier that year I said no I can't do the operation as I have exams and already had to take a year out. I now think if I didn't sign that piece paper, things would have been different. (Code=regret) (**Theme=Loss of reproductive potential**)

Interviewer: Have you been able to speak to a doctor since about the operation, about your concern?

P6: No I didn't, I didn't feel confident as I relied on the doctors, as I thought if they didn't need to do it they wouldn't have done it. (Code=lack of confidence)

Errrr, I remember when I had my womb removed, I was in room by myself for a couple of days and then they said I can go on the ward as they needed the room for someone else. When I was in the ward I was put next to a White woman and she said she came in for an operation for fibroids but she looked happy. I didn't ask her if everything had gone okay. I could see she looked happy. But I didn't ask her. I was feeling so crap I just listened to her telling me she was okay and they removed the fibroids. At the time I thought about the doctors, if they didn't need to do it they wouldn't have done it. But sometimes I wonder, particularly when I hear about so many Black women having their womb removed due to fibroids. (Code=racist practices in health care services) (**Theme=Loss of reproductive potential**)

Interviewer: As result of that you were unable to have children?

P6: I couldn't have children. There was nothing I could do about it after it happened. I did sign the papers. The way they explained it, if something went wrong they would have to find a next of kin to give consent. It would save a lot of time if I gave consent. I wondered what would have happened if I didn't give consent; would they would have to save the womb. I didn't put a next of kin down.

Interviewer: How did this make you feel, after the operation?

P6: When it happened and they told me it had gone, I felt oh shit, [crying] everything had gone [crying]. (**Theme=Loss**)

Interviewer: Should we stop the interview?

P6: No, you know when you plan everything, you will get married, save up for a house and have kids. I said I don't need to get married anymore. All my plans have gone out of the window [crying]. (Code=all my plans have gone out of the window)

Interviewer: Should we take a break?

P6: No, I'm fine. I remember I wanted a lovely big house. That also went out of the window [awkward laugh].

Interviewer: Did not having children mean you couldn't get married?

P6: I felt that I didn't need to get married now, at the time, but I wouldn't mind now. But it's not easy to meet someone. I'm not that outgoing and find it difficult to trust people. I think it's linked to my childhood and not feeling loved by my mum. (Code=not being able to build relationships)  
Errrrr, for me to have children I would have to be within a marriage. It couldn't be outside. (Code=adhering to traditional beliefs about marriage and children) (**Theme=Identity**)

Interviewer: Have you had relationships after the operation?

P6: I'm not in a relationship and never had a serious one with someone I really wanted to marry. I don't make an effort as I find it hard to socialise and meet new people. A lot of the relationships that seem to be happening now don't seem to be giving 50/50. If they aren't given 50 I'm not interested. (Code=unable to build relationships)

I'm not having a stupid relationship where I don't get nothing back. Excuse me, I do need a tissue now. It is difficult to make friends with males, with Black males. I don't know too many White people and I don't trust them either. I can say in my whole life only half a dozen White people I can say are my friends. My experiences with my mum played a role in this and my relationships. I had to have counselling to understand this and get over what happened to me. I was able to let a lot of things go and move on.  
(Code=support to come to terms with my experiences)

Interviewer: What have your experiences been not having children?

P6: Well, as it was expected for me to have children, everybody expected me to. (Code=expectation to have children) If they don't say anything they give you an odd look. There was a young Black man I worked with. Ten years ago we were just talking and I said I didn't have children and he said why's that. I wanted to say get lost. I just simply said I haven't met anyone yet who I wanted to have children with. He said that's unusual.  
(Code=being treated differently and less than) Some of the stuff he was saying, and he was a social worker [laugh].

Interviewer: Was he a Caribbean man? Did he mean unusual for a Caribbean woman?

P6: Yes, he said by your age Black women have several children by now. I just said no, I don't, big deal, piss off.

I then kept it light and said I haven't met anyone yet. He kept going on about it. I said my mum is a single mum and I know it's hard and I don't want that for myself. That shut him up. I had to leave and go out and have a big lunch and buy some things to recover. It's like you're not normal. (Code=managing being treated differently) (**Theme=Resilience**) I have had that several times over and over. The Caribbean community think there is something wrong with me. (Code=being treated differently and less than)

Interviewer: Is there an expectation in the Caribbean community to have children?

P6: I was expected to have children and loads of them. I have been told that. I feel like a failure at times and let people down. (Code=feeling like a failure)

Interviewer: How did you respond to that expectation?

P6: I would normally respond by saying that I don't have children as I haven't met anyone. If that wasn't my response I would end up being very rude or end up in tears, particularly that woman who said I don't like children and a few people were there. People say that without knowing that people may not be able to have children. (Code=managing being treated differently) (**Theme=Resilience**)

Interviewer: How did your family respond?

P6: My mum doesn't understand. When I came out of hospital I went to stay with her; it didn't work out so I went home to stay by myself. I don't know how much she knows about it. We never really talked about it. My brother and sisters, I don't know what they think and don't particularly care.

Interviewer: Have you considered having children via other routes such as adoption, fostering?

P6: At one point I thought about fostering and adoption but by then I was building my career. (Code=looking at other options to have children) I didn't go to university until I was 30 and didn't finish until I was 37. I then moved to London in my forties. I thought I was on my own, where would I put the child? You don't have the room or the money. You still have to pay your mortgage and pay your bills. I didn't want to be looking after somebody and be tight for money. So that was it really. So that was



something I ruled out. Later on, if I retire I would consider fostering. I would be useful to somebody.

Interviewer: What do you do in terms of social life and relationships?

P6: In this job, you'll be lucky. I like history, museums. I visit places like stately homes and heritage sites, things like that. I like to walk, eating out, and I like learning, college courses are so expensive.

Interviewer: Do you have a social network?

P6: I do like spending time with my nephews and nieces and building a great relationship with them when I can. It brings me a sort of fulfilment that I would have got from having children (**Theme=Caribbean community mothering**) I also look after my mum because it's left down to me.

Interviewer: Why is it down to you?

P6: Well, the others have children so they have responsibilities.  
(Code=caring for parents) My other sister can, but she is unwell. My older brother won't be asked to do anything as he is never asked. My mum doesn't get along with my other sister and I don't know why; my step-dad's daughter. So it's down to me. One because I'm single and I have no children so this means no responsibilities, and two perhaps because I am the

only one who is willing to do it. I just do house work and her shopping. My job is busy, but as I am less committed to it now I can work flexibly around my work to help her.